

YOUNG GREER
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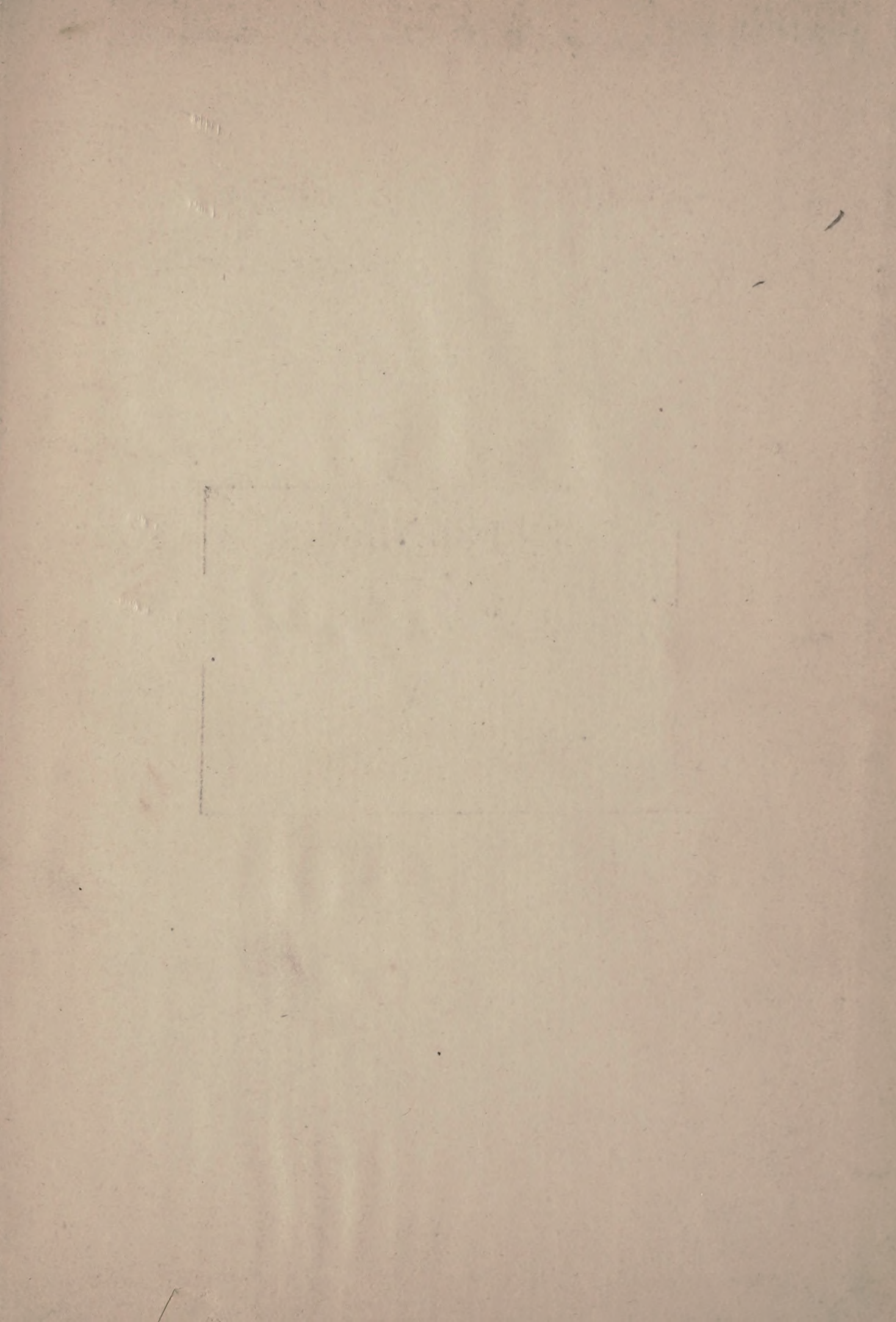
ELEANOR TALBOT KINKEAD

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YOUNG GREER OF KENTUCKY.

YOUNG GREER OF KENTUCKY

A Novel

BY

ELEANOR TALBOT KINKEAD,

AUTHOR OF

“'GAINST WIND AND TIDE.”

“There's rosemary, that's for remembrance;
'Pray you, love, remember.”—*Hamlet*.

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Young Greer of Kentucky.

I.

JUNE in Kentucky and the meadows all abloom! The tall blue-grass with its feathery coronal shyly bent to the summer breeze — to listen to some wondrous tale of violet and clover, or of mystic whisperings heard amid the rustling corn. Piercing even the dense forests of oak and elm, walnut and maple, over all the brilliant sunlight flashed with a lavish splendor, waking into fruit and flower every growing thing of earth, and falling like a benediction on long fields of barley, wheat, and rye.

Dorinda, sitting in the doorway of the old farm-house, had only to lift up her

eyes to behold on every hand a land of peace and plenty, to whose dreamy beatitude the flocks and herds on the quiet, hill-slopes lent a tranquil charm.

She was stemming a bowl of rich, red berries for supper, pausing, from time to time, to glance away, a trifle uneasily, toward the afternoon shadows, which were stealthily lengthening across the rolling green sward, and to listen to the light wind in the clump of pine trees in the rear. To-day, in their mournful cadence, she detected something of both a warning and a menace. She could not close her ears to the persistent sound.

Presently her hands fell idly into her lap. Her eyes, under the stress of a swift reminder, were suddenly lowered; her cheeks flushed crimson as the fruit over which her face was bent.

And the tall pine trees, like gossiping

old crones, bent their heads together and spoke always of him !

She was very pretty, in a certain insolent, sullen fashion ; and she was a pleasant picture in her checked gingham gown, with masses of bronze hair loosely coiled round and round a somewhat defiant little head. Small in stature and very delicately made, she was erect and spirited in bearing, quick but graceful in every movement. On looking at her, one was struck at once with her intense nervous force, joined to a kind of tropical warmth and languor. Her lips, a trifle too full and red, closed over rows of small, even, milk-white teeth. Her eyes, of a changeful amber, seemed to hold always a lurking, secret fire under their heavily fringed lids, as if a ray of sunlight had pierced to some densely shadowed pool and illumined all its depths. Though roughened by a too careless exposure to

the sun, her hands were yet shapely and pleasing in a way; but they were the hands of a child rather than of a woman, being of the fragile, appealing kind that evoke tenderness.

She was a creature of whims and contradictions, and it pleased her not to look up, by so much as a glance, from the simple task before her, when, after a time, there was a click at the garden gate near by, and a man came slowly toward her across the lawn. He paused, at length, with one foot on the steps of the little vine-covered portico, and peered inquiringly into her face, his honest gray eyes lighting into a merry twinkle.

He was a man of about five-and-sixty years of age, tall, angular, and singularly spare, his shoulders drooping wearily, as if weighted down under the toilsome burden of life. A shock of long, iron-gray hair fell back from

his thin features. In his expression there was a look of pathetic entreaty, such as one sometimes sees in the eyes of dumb creatures. He was in his shirt-sleeves, the day being warm, but he carried on his arm a faded coat, which somewhat approximated in color the light-blue jean trousers which he wore tucked in his boots in the primitive fashion of the mountaineer. He stood for some moments attentively regarding the girl, always with the same quizzical, yet earnest gaze.

"D'rindy," he said, presently, speaking in the dialect that thirty years' contact with a different mode of speech had failed to affect, "'pears to me like ye air about to turn thet young feller's head with all yer fixin's-up an' goin's-on," with a sly nod in the direction of the interior of the house, newly swept and garnished in anticipation of a long-expected arrival. "'Pears like it to

me," he added, sententiously, a broad smile chasing itself over his wrinkled, sun-burnt face.

In truth there was much hurrying to and fro. Occasionally, from some upper chamber or distant hallway, there echoed a strident tone of command, jarring painfully upon the calm of the summer afternoon.

But Dorinda was apparently not in a mood for conversation; she made no reply, though the color slightly deepened in her cheeks, and a proud light—half of pain, half of resentment—shot for an instant into her eyes. The man paused abruptly and turned away in sudden confusion, at the same time giving a startled look toward the doorway at the sound of approaching footsteps.

A woman was coming toward them down the long hall with quick, nervous tread, her basket of keys rattling on her arm.

She was a stout, blonde, middle-aged woman, dressed in a black alpaca gown, none too neat in its appearance, the general untidiness, however, being somewhat relieved by a long white cotton apron, freshly ironed and very stiffly starched, which concealed the front of the dress from waist to hem.

Micajah regarded her with the look of uncertainty and awe with which he was invariably inspired in the presence of his respected, but, it must be admitted, much-dreaded spouse, as she sunk, evidently in a state of complete exhaustion, upon one of the wooden benches that flanked the porch on either side.

"Well, I *am* tired!" she exclaimed with emphasis, addressing herself to no one in particular, and leaning back wearily against the brick wall of the house. "I've been on my feet since the dawn of day, an' here it's nearly

fo' o'clock, an' things not half done yet. Micajah," darting a hasty, impatient glance at the tall, lank figure, still standing on the steps below, "has anybody tole Steve he's got to go to town with the rockaway? Sakes-a-live, Micajah!" she fairly screamed, springing with alacrity to her feet, on noting the blank look of hopeless confusion upon her husband's countenance, "can't you never think of *nothin'*? Well, I'd like to know if there's anything ever would be done on this place from morn till night, if 't'wa'n't for me!" As she hurried away, the basket of keys on her arm made an angry, jangling sound that bespoke her wrath.

Micajah, wisely realizing the utter futility of any attempt at explanation or of offering assistance in her present frame of mind, resigned himself with characteristic philosophy to the situation. "Mankind air naterally fond

of abuse," he muttered, as he seated himself comfortably on the bench she had vacated. Taking out his cob pipe, he let his thoughts travel slowly backward.

One-and-thirty years before he had married Maria Holt, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer of the blue-grass—a young woman celebrated in her locality more for a native shrewdness and a somewhat caustic and pointed method of expression than for the possession of personal charm. His marriage had not been a happy one. Developing an indomitable will, and, moreover, being disturbed as time went on by certain social pretensions and aspirations, his wife seemed unable to rid herself of the thought that she had made an unfortunate misalliance in marrying the tall young mountaineer employed in the humble capacity of post-and-railer upon her father's farm. She had so

thoroughly convinced Micajah himself of her condescension in their union, that it was with difficulty he could even attain to a realizing sense of his own parental right of interest in their son and only child, for whom, it appeared, her ambitious hopes knew neither reason nor limitation. It was, therefore, with a kind of shy apprehension, a feeling of remoteness, touching in its simple meekness and unconscious abasement, that, for the past three days, he had been silently regarding the preparations in his household for the return of this young man after a four-years' course of study in a German university. Micajah alike dreaded and longed for the meeting with his son, whose brief visits during his college days at Princeton had been events of no less importance in his eyes than the invasion of an army or the revolution of a nation.

From under her thick lashes Dorinda cast furtive glances at the long, quiet figure.

"Could you get all the hands you wanted on the farm to-day?" she asked presently, her face suddenly becoming very sweet and gentle, as she lifted it for an instant to his. Her voice had in it the soft, caressing tones with which one speaks to a little child.

Micajah continued smoking leisurely for several seconds before he replied. Then he took the pipe from his mouth and, slowly turning, let his eyes rest lingeringly upon her. He could never look at Dorinda without being reminded of all the wild, sweet beauty of the mountains. For had she too not looked upon the long range of the Cumberland, and heard the water trickling down the steep ravines, and seen the laurel and the rhododendron, and

the tall mountain ferns? The very breath of the hills was about her.

She was the daughter of a favorite cousin, who had died twelve years before, leaving the child orphaned and alone in the world. There was something for which he felt always an undying gratitude to Maria; in her own blunt fashion she had shown unfailing kindness to the little waif who held so warm a place in his lonely old heart. In no way had she been made to feel her dependence. In consequence, the girl had grown into womanhood unacquainted with either harshness or neglect, having been allowed to develop freely, according to her own natural bent and inclinations. Moreover, she had been given such opportunities for education as the country schools afforded, and to Micajah, who regarded her with mingled pride and adoration, she was a miracle of learning

unsurpassed by any save Harvey himself.

"Yaas," he said, at length, in his quaint drawl, first pausing to press one lean fore-finger into the bowl of his pipe, "six big, strappin'-lookin' fellers come along this mornin', an' I hired 'em all quick ez a wink. We air a-gettin' along," he admitted, serenely, "an' likely to bring in a sight o' money from the craps this year; but it takes a sight o' money to keep a-goin," he added, meditatively.

There followed a long silence, broken only by the drowsy hum of insects and the sougling sound of the wind in the branches. Dorinda was again lending herself to her task with steady persistence, apparently wholly absorbed in it. The heavy footfalls within had gradually ceased; everything was peaceful, calm, and delicious. An old rooster, strutting through the farm-

yard, uttered a prolonged crow, and as the echo died away the stillness appeared intensified.

Micajah Greer, puffing away in his corner of the porch, and watching the girl from under his half-closed eyelids, felt his brain stirred anew with a thought that had long been to him a cherished dream, but to which he had never before dared give expression by any outward sign.

"D'rindy," he said, cautiously, suddenly bending toward her, seeing that she was about to rise, having gathered up the bowl of strawberries at her side, "D'rindy," touching her gently on the arm, "thet air a powerful fine-lookin' pictyer a-hangin' in thar on the wall," making a motion with his hand in the direction of the august apartment designated as "the parlor." "An' he must hev a sight o' larnin', arter all them years in thet furrin

kentry. But D'rindy," his voice faltering and sinking down into an infinite tenderness and pleading, as the girl, stung by some vague alarm, hastily drew back, trembling violently, her eyes dilating, "he allers did set a heap o' sto' by you, an' he aint the kind to be a-puttin' on ahrs over his own blood kin, if I aint mighty mistaken."

He had risen, and now stood towering above the little slim form. The muscles around his mouth twitched nervously, and the hand that still held the cob pipe shook with suppressed emotion. His voice had a quavering, feeble sound. He appeared to have become suddenly very old. He leaned forward and kissed her on the brow, a demonstration of affection he seldom displayed, and which lent an added solemnity to the occasion.

"D'rindy, somethin' tells me it aint

fer long I'm goin' to be with ye; this pain in my chist hyar hev come to me agin an' agin ez a sorter warnin' like; an' it aint in the course o' natur thet I shouldn't be the first to go. Child," with a sharp emphasis, "hev ye forgot how he useter ride ye down the long hill on yer little sled, an' useter laugh ye out o' yer cryin', an' tantrums, an' sech?" With a timid touch his roughened hand hovered unsteadily over the brown head drooping so low before him. "An' thet summer," he went on in mild reminiscence, letting his eyes wander dreamily away to where the sunlight flashed on the wheat fields in the distance, "thet summer he come home arter he'd got his diplomy—sech a tall, fine-lookin' young man—he 'lowed you was an out-an'-out beauty, he did. D'rindy—if you an' him—D'rindy—"

With the sharp, reproachful cry of

one who has received into his breast a mortal wound from a well-beloved hand, the girl sprung quickly back, reeling slightly as from the blow. His words, blending with her own thoughts, filled her with a sense of the most galling humiliation and dismay. For an instant she stood her ground, her eyes flashing, defiant, bitterly resentful.

The delicate nostrils quivered in intense pain, and every vestige of color slowly drifted from the sensitive, willful face, whereon pride and abasement struggled most pitiably. Then, with a sudden movement, she put up both her hands and bent her head down to them as a crimson flood-tide of shame swept over her from neck to brow. A moment afterward, to his infinite surprise and consternation, she had flung herself sobbing at his feet.

“Why, D’rindy! Why, D’rindy! What

ails ye, child?" the old man exclaimed anxiously, casting helpless, troubled glances about him, roused out of the usual stolid calm of his demeanor by this most unexpected outbreak.

If the matter he had been trying to touch upon with all the delicacy of which he was capable had been greeted with a burst of wild, derisive, yet fondly sweet, laughter, such as she not unfrequently bestowed upon his blundering awkwardness; or, if she had suddenly turned upon him in sharp retort, with hot, reckless words of anger, repented of almost as soon as uttered, that would have seemed quite in the natural order of things, just as it should be; in fact, *that* would have been Dorinda. But this little crumpled, sobbing creature at his feet, acutely suffering under the stress of an emotion wholly beyond his simple ken — how was he to comfort her?

He could only continue to look vaguely around, as if seeking an explanation from the inanimate things about him. His hand in a kind of mechanical way again began to move soothingly, yet cautiously, as if half-fearing a repulse, to and fro over the thick coils of shining hair.

"D'rindy," he ventured at length, very gently, "it be a sad sight fer these old eyes to see ye grievin' same ez yer young heart was 'bout to break, an' the cause all unbeknownst to me. Hyar, look up, honey, my little one, my pet! *What* ails ye, D'rindy?"

"*Don't!*" she whispered, huskily, still clinging about his knees, and hiding her face from his sight, "*Don't!*"

"I ain't got no call to do nothin' to vex ye, D'rindy," he said, sorrowfully.

"Oh, it was so cruel to talk like that," she broke forth, after a time,

in a kind of choked, muffled voice, "about dying — and — and that. Who is there to love me in all the world but you?"

At first she could not bring herself to meet his shifting glance, but presently her eyes, filled with a passionate pleading, did not shrink.

"Promise me that you will not talk like that again — about going — and — him," her voice faltering. "Indeed, indeed, I can not bear it. It isn't kind; it *hurts* me so," a strained look contracting the delicate brows for an instant. "Oh," springing abruptly to her feet, appalled by a blinding thought, "if ever you should say this to *him!*" as she staggered back aghast.

And then, though he held out his arms to her — sorely troubled as he was and perplexed — calling her by name and imploring her forgiveness,

she rushed, unheeding, past, and soon
he heard the door of her own room
close and the bolt slip.

II.

SEVERAL hours later there was a sound of carriage wheels in the distance. The narrow lane leading from the broad highway was but rarely traversed, and the unfrequent noise of an approaching vehicle upon the rocky road could be heard far away.

At the first echo of the horse's hoofs, Dorinda, who, for the past three-quarters of an hour, had been straining her ears for the sound, sprung hurriedly to her feet, at the same time uttering a low, sharp cry of stifled joy and dread. "He is coming, coming, coming!" she whispered under her breath. Her eyes grew soft, radiant—beautiful in their mysterious kindling. Her fragile, childlike form seemed to sway and bend with her

quick breathing. For an instant her heart leaped and fluttered beneath her thin gown like some wild, caged, little creature trying to escape, then fell in tune with the steady reverberations drawing ever nearer and nearer.

She gave startled glances about the bare walls of her sparsely furnished bedroom. A huge mahogany mausoleum, on which her lithe young limbs were wont to sink into repose, stood in one corner. A white marseilles counterpane was stretched tightly across its broad surface from side to side, its four tall posts being surmounted by a most wonderful tester, whereon birds of paradise and fowls that were never yet on land or sea fluttered and pirouetted in delightful disregard of reality. There were no pictures, no soft, easy, lounging chairs, no delicate feminine touches daintily suggestive of my lady's boudoir; but everything

was spotlessly neat and rigidly in order. There was a two-ply carpet on the floor, and some dimity curtains hung at the windows, stiffly tied with bows of cherry-colored ribbon. A hideous wardrobe thrust itself obtrusively upon the sight, after the manner of offensive objects in general. A tall bureau, above which swung a mirror inconveniently high, a washstand, and two chairs—one stiff-backed, the other a split-seated, old-time rocker—completed an effect that was not lacking in a certain element of picturesqueness and the characteristic Southern aspect.

There was a halt, a moment's stillness—the surrey had reached the gate, a quarter of a mile distant. In a few moments he would be here. She drew back from the window, trembling, her hands cold to the finger tips.

She gave an uncertain glance in the mirror, and then turned drearily away with a hopeless, pathetic gesture of regret. For the picture there revealed, of a young girl in a white muslin gown made in simplest fashion, was by no means to her liking. She could not have told wherein she failed; but in that moment she had become possessed of an altogether new and passionate longing to be different. To feel awkward and countrified, or to experience an instant's anxiety as to the possible opinion that might be entertained in regard to her, was galling to the proud sensitiveness of her imperious and wholly ungoverned nature. It filled her with a kind of fright and savage rebellion. In her pride and mortification she could have torn off the ill-fitting gown, upon which her unskillful fingers had spent so many hours, and

have trampled it fiercely under foot. Quick, childish tears sprung to her eyes, but she forced them back with a spirit of instinctive resistance.

The carriage had finally paused under her window, and the sound of hurrying footsteps, and voices in excited greeting, floated up to her with the breath of honeysuckle and mignonette and new-mown hay.

The twilight of the sweet June day had begun to gather. From far away in the dense oak woods, a whip-poor-will's plaintive call mingled with the drowsy twittering beneath the eaves.

"Lord, but we air glad to see ye, Harvey!" interspersed with shrill, spasmodic feminine laughter, reached her from time to time, as she stood spellbound, a sickening sense of discomfiture stealing over her, listening and waiting, waiting and listening, to every word they spoke.

“But Dorinda—where is Dorinda?” The ringing tenor voice with its well-remembered timbre of sweetness, his light laughter, brought her to herself. She must go down. But how that voice thrilled and stung her in its careless levity and indifferent kindness! All night she had heard it calling, calling in her sleep, and it had seemed to mock.

Suddenly, with a tightening of the lips and a proud uplifting of her small figure, she turned, walked quickly from the room and down the stairs.

“Women air powerful onsertain critters, Harvey,” Micajah was explaining to his son, out of the depth of a rich experience, apologetically of Dorinda’s non-appearance; “thar aint no countin’ on ’em,” with a sly shake of the head. “Thar’s D’rindy, now—she’s skittish, D’rindy is; jest as mild an’ gentle part o’ the time ez my old gray mare on

the way to meetin', then, all of a sudden, she hev broke the traces an' kicked the spatterboard, an' afore you know it you air a-layin' in the ditch a-enquirin' of yerself the cause o' the trouble."

At this unique revelation of character the young man broke into a hearty laugh.

Dorinda stood in the doorway for an instant unobserved. She was taking in the scene quite calmly. Mrs. Greer, in her best black silk gown, flushed and elated, was sitting on one side of the porch, surveying her offspring with glances of fond parental pride and undisguised admiration. Micajah, in his "Sunday clo'es," awkward and ill at ease, sprawled near by with his usual air of calm self-effacement. The faultlessly dressed young gentleman upon the rude wooden bench opposite appeared somewhat out of harmony with his surroundings.

He had thrown one arm carelessly back of his head, and was looking out upon the familiar landscape. The cool wind played with the thick brown hair about his temples. Dorinda regarded him critically and a trifle severely. She found his air of non-chalance and amiable toleration very irritating. It produced in her a spirit of mutiny and displeasure. She made a slight movement. He heard her, turned quickly, and was on his feet in an instant.

“Dorinda!”

With a characteristic, flattering gesture of alertness, he came forward to meet her, holding out both his hands. “Dorinda, I am so glad to see you!” he exclaimed, warmly.

He bent down and would have kissed her in simple cousinly fashion, but she drew back. Though she greeted him cordially, it was yet with a reserve

that both surprised and puzzled him for a moment.

With a cool little motion she waived him back to his seat, and he, smiling still, and wholly at a loss to account for her formality, accepted it without comment, his eyes fixed upon her face with an expression of amused inquiry.

He was a tall, well-built young fellow of nine-and-twenty, with a face of singular attraction and interest—a face with even a touch of fascination and poetic fire. Scholarly, dignified, rather elegant in bearing, one would have noticed him in any crowd. There was a combined strength and sweetness about the well-modeled mouth, thought and determination impressed upon every feature of his smooth-shaven face. The glasses which he wore almost habitually above his slightly aquiline nose increased the literary suggestiveness of his general appearance. Though in his attire there

was a certain marked carefulness of detail, yet he wore his clothes easily—as a gentleman—and there was not a trace of self-consciousness about him in any way.

“I am so glad to see you, Dorinda,” he repeated, enthusiastically. “I have been picturing to myself all through the drive home, what a delightful companion you will be in the long, lazy summer days of the next three months. And, by the way, what a little beauty you have become!”

The girl grew rosy and facile under his praise.

“But, Harvey,” she suggested, dubiously, “I am afraid it will be very lonely for you here?” There was a sudden timidity in her voice that worked a transformation. The young man noted the change. He gave her another brief, sweeping glance. How very pretty she was!

"Thet young gal over to the Gin'ral's 'pears to be hevin' a powerful lonesome sorter time of it," Micajah put in at this juncture. "She aint hed much chance to wear many o' them fine clo'es she brung along with her in thet big trunk, I'm a-thinkin'. I seed her standin' in the hall at Grassland t'other day, an' 'peared to me like she was lookin' mighty low-sperrited an' down in the mouth."

"I don't see why it's any more lonesome for her than for other people," Dorinda replied, doggedly, looking away. The mobile, changeful little face had grown hard, and an undisguised bitterness had crept into her voice.

The old man looked up quickly. A long experience had taught him a tact of management with Dorinda, not unlike that which he was accustomed to employ with an unbroken filly.

"Thet's so, D'rindy," he assented,

mildly, "thet's so. Young folks is purty much all alike, I reckon. I 'low 'twas jest thet big trunk an' all them fine clo'es thet set me a-steddyin'. Lord, now I wouldn't hev to wear all them fine clo'es fer nothin'," shifting uneasily under the restraint and elegance of his own proud apparel.

Dorinda had seen the young woman referred to in the old country church, and her beauty had stung her, leaving a sense of disquieting pain. It had seemed to stifle and oppress her like the rich odor of certain gorgeous, tropical blooms. At the first sight of her, her heart had stood still. During the entire service she had watched her breathlessly, unmindful of text or sermon, heedless of supplication or of song. Never in the whole course of her obscure existence had she looked upon so wonderful a being as this lovely golden-haired woman in her

unconscious serenity and grace. The conflicting emotions with which she regarded her amounted to a definite experience, that contained in it all the enduring elements of a mental shock. The realization had come to her instantaneously of a wider meaning to life than had heretofore presented itself. Her horizon, formerly bounded by the simplest conditions and aspirations, seemed to stretch away into infinite space. She was conscious of an unreasoning dissatisfaction and revolt. But it was not merely a longing for material things, the bland amenities of a luxurious existence — though she, too, would have liked to wear soft raiment and live in kings' houses — it was rather a desire, thoroughly feminine and strengthened by the sharp recognition of her own deficiency, for the possession of all that goes together to render a woman lovable and complete.

The picture of Margaret Pryor, as she saw her sitting in the dark background of the high pew, rose before her anew, vivid, distinct, in the airy picturesqueness of her cool white draperies. And it was in the society of such women as she that Harvey Greer had spent so many years of his life! She brought her lips together with a sudden compression.

But the young man's face betrayed only an indifferent interest.

"Well, I've no doubt she's lonesome enough," Mrs. Greer remarked pointedly, with a shrug of her fat shoulders, "anybody'd be, buried out here ten miles in the country. But what she come for? That's what I'm sayin'. Beaus is scarce in this neighborhood," with a short laugh, "leastways I don't see many comin' round Dorinda, here, unless it be that young preacher from over at Walnut Hill, that Dorinda

won't so much as turn her head an' look at. But she's an out an' out beauty, an' no mistake about it," she added emphatically, with all the air of a connoisseur in such matters. "When she come walkin' in church last Sunday mornin' in that white dress an' all that soft lace about her, I said to myself, 'If only Harvey could see that!' I tell Dorinda," she broke off, "'t would be a fine chance to study the latest fashions, if it *is* in meetin'—an' a cat can look at a king—but Dorinda never was a very good hand with her needle."

Harvey winced and looked slightly annoyed. The girl's cheeks were burning crimson.

"I hope Dorinda will not resort to such methods of studying the latest fashions," he answered dryly, "particularly as she seems to have already succeeded in making herself so lovely," he concluded, with kindly intent, not-

ing the poor child's embarrassment and distress.

He had a kind heart, and, moreover, he was always conscious of a sense of personal discomfort at the sight of another's pain.

"I am sure this gown you have on is perfect; did you make it yourself?" he asked, reassuringly.

Dorinda's sense of humor was one of those blessings for which, no doubt, it had never occurred to her to give thanks, but it had often served to carry her scathless through many a trying situation, in spite of the little flying poisoned darts. At this absurdly palpable attempt upon the part of the young man to soothe her wounded feelings, she broke into a laugh, so sweet and spontaneous and delicious, Harvey forgot that it was against him her mirth was leveled, and joined in. It reminded him, in its delightful over-

flow, of an experience one day in Switzerland, a year before, when, with a party of friends, wearied and thirsting from their long tramp, he had suddenly come upon a sparkling little mountain stream, tumbling musically down a steep ravine.

"But who else, Harvey?" she inquired, suavely, the corners of her mouth twitching still, as she looked up derisively into his face, holding her small head slightly to one side.

"I had rather the impression that you had ordered it from New York or Paris," the young man replied with great gravity and a lame pretense at ignoring the occasion of her ridicule. But he was beginning to experience a certain uneasiness in the presence of Dorinda, though he laughed back at her with the utmost good nature.

He rose and stood leaning against one of the slender vine-encircled posts

that supported the narrow little portico. Both his parents had gone within. The summer twilight was wrapping the lonely hills in a purple gauze. He heard a tinkling of sheep bells in the distance, and the voices of the farmhands singing some plaintive negro melody as they trudged homeward through the fields. How idyllic and delightful it was, and what old memories it awoke in him after all those crowded, feverish, busy years, in which ambition and a kind of boyish exuberance in almost every form of pleasure had seemed ever struggling for the mastery!

"My love of all beautiful things is destined to work my ruin some day," he had once prophesied jestingly to a friend. In looking at Dorinda he was conscious of the same keen artistic gratification that he would have experienced in regarding an excellently

well-executed water-color or pastel. She was for him simply a part of the delicious June day.

He felt an indulgent, brotherly sort of interest in her, and presently found himself wishing vaguely that her lot had been less narrow. In his imagination he saw her decked out in the dainty paraphernalia of certain women he had known, her expression controlled, all the ungoverned impulses of her temperament held within the leash of that enforced restraint which contact with the world demands, and realized that few, if any, could have surpassed her had the opportunity for this enlightenment been hers.

He thought it might be possible for him to help her in many ways. But he was too much of a poet not to recognize the charm of her incompleteness.

“What friends we are going to be,

Dorinda!" he said, finally, rousing himself from his reverie. "Do you know when I said good-by to you four years ago, I hardly thought there was such good fortune ahead of me as to find you still here when I returned? I had made quite sure that some young fellow would have come along and carried you off long ago."

Dorinda's eyes were lowered, the little head drooping slightly as under the weight of its heavy coils of hair.

"But you find me still here," she answered softly, after a time.

"Yes, I find you still here," he repeated, "and heartily glad I am of it, too. Why, what on earth would I do without you, Dorinda?" he asked, in mock dismay. "I have no doubt whatever that the fates have reserved you for my sole and separate benefit. And you may be assured I shall make the best of my opportunity. I

feel all kinds of savage and tyrannical instincts kindling in me. In the first place, then," he concluded despotically, "you are to offer yourself as a victim for my amusement. We shall walk together, ride together, and read books together—which will be delightful. By the way, Dorinda, did you ever read any of Robert Browning's poetry?"

"No," she admitted, reluctantly, "I never did."

"Then you must begin and cultivate his acquaintance at once; to-morrow, if you wish. Not that he's such a prime favorite of mine, either—but everybody reads him nowadays. And then there's Carlyle, and Ruskin, and Tennyson, and the Arnolds, and Tolstoi, and Swinburne—oh, by the way, I think we'll cut short on those last two," coming to a sudden halt in his enumeration.

"Why?" Dorinda asked, breathlessly, an unrestrained eagerness illuminating her features, and suffusing a warm, bright glow of unspeakable delight. "Why?"

"Why, Dorinda?" he meditated, looking pensively down on her pretty, flushed face lifted thirstingly to his. "Well, there are a good many reasons why. In the first place, I doubt if we shall have time—the summer does not last forever, you know." Dorinda's face fell.

"After all, I may not be here more than a month, or six weeks, at the longest. I should like to go and survey the future scene of my labors—get my bearings, so to speak—before I say good-by for good and all. These curious twistings of destiny, as manifested in one's own existence, furnish considerable food for reflection. Did it ever occur to you, Dorinda," he in-

quired, in the light and bantering tone he chose to adopt with her, "what a complicated and mystifying problem this human life is continually serving up for elucidation by us? 'Reasoning at every step he treads, man yet mistakes his way,'" he quoted, musingly.

The light slowly faded out of the girl's eyes; she had grown very pale. With a piteous little movement of pain she turned away her head.

"I thought," she faltered, "I thought—as you would be so near to us—Virginia's not very far away—that sometimes we might see you, perhaps—once in a great while?"

"And so you will," he responded, cheerfully, "provided you are here to see—visions of that young Lochinvar that is to come and carry you away from us are still haunting my fancy, you observe. In the meantime," hearken-
ing to the sound of the supper-bell

in the distance, "come and give me something to eat. Come, Dorinda; I'm as hungry as a wolf."

III.

"HE'S a credit to ye, Marier, no denyin' thet. Puts me jest a *leetle* in mind now—with them specks hitched up on his nose an' a-topplin' off continually—of thet young, furrin-lookin' chap thet was down hyar last fall a-spyin' out blue-grass lan's an' talkin' horse-flesh same ez a buzz-saw; but he's a credit to ye, thar's no denyin' thet."

This remark of his father, accidentally overheard on the evening of his arrival, appealed to Harvey with a profound and touching significance. It seemed to cling to him with a painfully persistent recurrence. After all, it was difficult for him to regard himself as a credit either to himself or to any one else; but their blind faith in him, their admiration and devotion,

only marked him, in his own estimation, as a failure and an ingrate.

It was with emotions too varied and complex to admit of analysis that he had returned to his native land and his old home after an absence of four years. Since landing in New York he had been trying hard to imagine himself both patriotic and happy, and had failed signally in his efforts. His old free student life had taken strong hold upon him. In the atmosphere of Heidelberg he had sought and found a truly ideal existence, and from his travels he had developed a breadth, an independence of thought, which rendered all idea of restraint particularly irksome. Although, during the past year, the necessity of returning to his own land and entering actively upon his vocation had frequently occurred to him, now that the time had really come for the step to

be taken, he found himself looking longingly back to the life he must forever abandon. But there had seemed to be no excuse for further delaying his return. He was a clever mathematician, and having been offered a chair in his special department in a college in Virginia, he felt constrained to accept the position. Yet he did so with reluctance and much inward dissatisfaction.

Perhaps, to some extent, the key to his character may be found in the fact that he was a dreamer, not a logician. He was a tremendous worker, a man of vast hopes and aspirations; but it seemed to him, on finding himself forced to squarely face his existence from the standpoint of the present situation, that he had done absolutely naught in view of all that he had planned and still wished to accomplish.

After all his years of incessant labor there were times when he questioned that he had not blundered in the choice of his life's work. Literature in its broadest application appealed strongly to him. He was an omnivorous reader. He had had published in the leading magazines of Europe and America numerous articles upon topics of the day, which had been commended; and he had rather the impression that some time he would write a novel—the great American novel, perhaps, so ardently desired and so tardy in appearing.

On the voyage homeward, he had spent hours thinking tenderly and reverently, and also, it must be confessed, a trifle remorsefully, of his father and mother. Above all, he felt the deepest gratitude for whatever sacrifices it had been their pleasure to make in his behalf. To others, be-

tween him and them, there must always remain an intellectual and social disparity, fostered on his part by constant study and the intimate association with men and women of the highest grade of cultivation; but his pride could never for one instant allow that he was separated, by any means whatever, from those united to him by the closest bonds of blood and affection. There is a true inborn dignity in the native Kentuckian which, with all his veneration for the claims of heredity and the old traditions, is absolutely self-sustaining. Young Greer, in his brave recognition of the obscurity of his own origin, in his unfailing courtesy, if possible more punctiliously exercised toward the members of his own household than to strangers, was in every way a gentleman, though he could boast no long line of distin-

guished ancestors, no heroes, statesmen, nor scholars to whom he could refer for those instincts of refinement which seemed his as a natural birth-right.

But unconsciously, by a process of gradual absorption, he had fallen under influences too potent to be disregarded. Deeply engrossed in his work, he had apparently cared little for the popularity he seemed, on every hand, to evoke. The doors of the distinguished, and the powerful, and the wealthy, had opened, as by a kind of magic, for him, and he, having once entered, became of necessity a part of the life of which he partook. During his college days at Princeton, he had fallen in with a clique of young men of high social prestige, and through these the society of New York and Washington had become a frequent experience.

Later on, in his sojourn abroad, encountering one of his old classmates, the son of a diplomatic representative of his country, he had seen a phase of life in foreign lands of which opportunity is given to few.

That he finally returned, after all his wanderings and experiences, to Kentucky, without ever having met a woman that aroused in him more than a fleeting admiration, is probably due to the fact that he was something of a poet and an idealist; and the women he had thus far known, in the brief and cursory consideration he had allowed them, appeared to him as either wholly joined to their idols of vanity, or wanting in imagination and sympathetic charm. Moreover, his ideal was already fixed, and his standard was peculiarly lofty. In other words, he was still quite young. As men grow older, they

become less exacting, the great law of compromise being better understood; their lost illusions may still cling to them in a measure, and at times harrow them with remembrance, but the light of common day is over all.

When Harvey Greer opened his eyes on the first morning of his return, the sun was high in the heavens. It was streaming in, full in his face, through the narrow little casement, falling in golden splashes upon the carpet, and glistening upon the bright colors of the hexagon silk quilt, spread as an ornament solely—for the night had been warm—across the foot of his bed. For an instant, he experienced an odd feeling of uncertainty as to time and locality; then, with a short laugh, he pulled his watch from under his pillow and looked about him. It was eight o'clock, and the family must have

breakfasted more than an hour ago. At this reflection he grew serious and took himself severely to task. He must on no account be guilty of such a fault again, he said to himself as he sprang out of bed. Why on earth, he insisted, should he obtrude upon them his more luxurious ideas of living? If the time ordained among them to break their fast should be seven o'clock, or even so barbarous an hour as six, he firmly resolved that there he would be in the midst of them without fail—a resolution which, be it said to his credit, he managed to adhere to with praiseworthy persistence.

As he came down the stairs from his bed-room, he was struck with the serene quietude over everything. There was no one stirring in any direction; the house appeared entirely deserted. But it was evident that its inmates had

not been spirited away in the night; for, whatever disorder there had been the day before was now repaired, and there prevailed an air of general supervision silently manifested on all sides. The doors were open and all the windows had been raised. Delicious odors of the sweet June day came floating in. A red-bird was singing in the branches near by, its strong, clear note now and again breaking forth into such a rapturous swell of ecstatic melody that the young man paused involuntarily to listen.

He finally made his way to the dining room, which was also forsaken. The cloth still remained on the table, but the breakfast had evidently long since been removed. It was in many respects the most agreeable room in the house, and furnished in better taste, in that there were here no futile attempts at adornment such as were displayed

elsewhere in a painful striving for effect. The furniture, which was of massive, beautiful mahogany, gave a look of substantial dignity. Harvey turned a quick glance about him.

Nothing was changed in any way. There in the corner ticked in loud, ominous voice the tall clock with the revolving moon, which had been one of the mysterious delights of his childhood. He drew nearer and looked up into the face of the bland old time-piece, smiling as benignly down upon him to-day as of old, its smooth dial reminding him of the soulless countenances that one sometimes encounters. On the broad sideboard there was the same array of silver goblets that he well remembered — most of them premiums won at fairs, proofs of domestic industry and honest competition. And there, beneath the window, was the low, cushioned seat on which as a little

child he had so often sat at the close of day, to watch with dreamy, wondering eyes the great red ball sink slowly out of sight behind the poplar trees. He could recall the strange thrill of anguish he had experienced in those moments, a passionate fear of he knew not what—a filling of the eyes with tears—a sense of overwhelming sadness and unutterable things. He recollected also the quick stroke with which he always dashed away the tears, lest, in his proud sensitiveness, there should be one to see and mock. After all, he reflected, how far, with all our philosophy, do we ever get beyond those earliest instincts and childish emotions? The mystery, the pride, the fear of unseen things, the darkness and the doubt—when do they cease to beset us?

Presently his mother heard him moving to and fro in the room and

hurried in, perspiring and out of breath, her blonde face even more florid than usual from bending over the kitchen stove, assisting in the preparation of his breakfast. She carried a large iron "waiter," laden with eatables, which, before he could get to her, she had deposited upon the table with such energy that all the dishes rattled crazily together, and were in imminent danger of being completely overthrown.

"Mother!" he broke forth, contritely, "how selfish I am to put you to such trouble! No, don't go for anything else," seeing that she was about to dart away again in the direction of the doorway, "I protest. Why, you have brought me the breakfast of a king. Here, sit down by me—I want to talk to you," and he drew her chair up quite close to his own.

Mrs. Greer obeyed with a shade of

reluctance, keeping her eyes fixed on the waiter to see that nothing was wanting, and surveying the whole with an air of depreciation.

“You’d better let me go an’ see about your flannel cakes, Harvey,” she objected, “they’ll be burned to a crisp, certain sure. That girl I’ve got now aint worth her salt. She knows no more about cookin’ than a heathen, after all the trouble I’ve had with her, too. An’ she’s an awful rogue,” she continued, letting her voice fall and drawing a little nearer; “you’d better keep a sharp eye on all your things—she bears watchin’. I do believe she’d steal the communion service itself if she got a chance at it.”

Harvey’s face wore an expression of becoming gravity. Moreover, he appeared deeply interested in these revelations of human depravity being dished up as a kind of sauce for his

morning repast. He held his knife and fork poised aloft a moment in natural hesitation as to where he should make a selection from so tempting an array.

It was a genuine Kentucky breakfast, and the young man felt disposed to show his appreciation of it over any other breakfast that had been offered him in years. He had fried chicken with cream gravy, and beefsteak, and cold ham—such ham as one seldom sees out of Kentucky—four or five different kinds of bread, chocolate, coffee, Alderney cream and butter, maple syrup, cherries, and strawberries fresh from the vines.

“But why do you keep this girl?” Harvey asked, immediately throwing his whole soul into the subject of the domestic grievances. “Why don’t you get somebody else to cook in her place, somebody who knows how, for in-

stance? Surely the culinary art has not declined in Kentucky?" he inquired, smiling at the mere suggestion.

"She's as good as anybody I can get, I reckon," Mrs. Greer responded, with a sigh of resignation. "If ever there was a triffin', worthless, no-'count set, it's the young niggers that's growin' up of this generation," she declared. "Freedom's turned their heads, may be. Housekeepin' in the blue-grass aint what it once was, Harvey, nor farmin' neither, for that matter. What with the mean kind of labor we get now, and your father's old-fashioned notions an' slow ways, we're likely to be lan' poo' all our days, far as I can see."

"Yes, but I thought," Harvey here interposed, pausing an instant to carve the juicy steak upon which his choice had finally fallen, "I thought that last year you had great success with the

crops. I don't see how you could hope to do much better. I confess I don't myself think there is much money in farming under the present system — but then what would you do?" he said, earnestly looking into her face.

"What would I do?" she cried, with sudden vehemence. "I'll tell you what I'd do. To begin with, I'd cut down all that worthless timber that's been cumberin' the ground for nobody knows how long, an' sell the best of it. Then I'd build barns, an' plow up the lan', an' plant tobaccer — there's money in tobaccer — an' I'd make more in two years than Micajah makes in any five; that's what I'd do."

There was in her manner all the old fretfulness and impatience with which he had been long familiar. As he looked at her from time to time, he noted with pain that the furrows in her brow had grown deeper in the

last four years. The petty annoyances of her daily existence had left their mark upon her countenance, where great energy and force of character of a certain order were yet strongly stamped. In his impotent desire to right things—a feeling with which he was often possessed—a shadow came into his eyes. His glance wandered away toward the open window and out upon the wilderness of green beyond. A brilliant, sapphire sky shone overhead. There was absolutely not a cloud. The clambering rose-vine near the window wafted in a delicious, spicy odor. Nature wore a look of intensity under the azure vault.

“No matter how barren the past may have been,
’Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green!”

It was so pathetic to him that *she* could not feel that, too, on a day like this; such a pity, he thought, in his untried strength and the hopefulness of

his brave young manhood, intoxicated as he was with this "new wine of the year," that there should be any blind to the glory over all the earth.

But when he looked into his mother's face, he heard again the throbbing of the great sad heart of humanity, by which his sensitive, sympathetic nature was often roused into impulsive action. He strove to divert her thoughts into pleasanter channels, and he realized that he could please her best by talking of himself. With modest egoism he told her of his work, his plans for the future, of the places he had visited, and of the life and customs in other lands; above all, he described to her the brilliant social scenes in which he had had a part, knowing well that such narration would delight her, perhaps, most of all. By the time breakfast was ended she had grown quite cheerful,

and her face shone as she looked proudly at him.

"Where shall I find Dorinda?" Harvey asked, as he rose from the table, with the prospect of a long day before him.

"If *you* can keep trac' of Dorinda, Harvey," she replied, with a nervous laugh, "it's more'n I can. Most likely she's off by herself somewheres, mop-in' in a corner maybe—there's no tellin'. I never saw the like of Dorinda since I was bawn. In my young days girls was always on the pad, leastways plannin' some rout or other, an' stickin' a ribbon in their hats to please the beaus. What with picnics, an' fairs, an' candy pullin's, an' goin' to meetin' of a Sunday, times useter be lively enough. Not that the fairs, an' the picnics, an' the rest of it ever done much for me," she added, in rueful recollection of her own misdi-

rected energies and ineffectual adornment. "An' then, the neighborhood's changed," she went on with a sigh, more for her vanished hopes than her present isolation. "It's quiet out here this summer as a cemetery, even over at Grassland, where there's such goin's on sometimes as you never saw. Ole Dilsey, that useter cook for me, comes over an' tells me all about the fine town folks that come ridin' out in their carriages, an' the music an' the dancin', an' the big suppers she helps to cook. Of course they'd never think of invitin' Dorinda—hold themselves above us, I reckon, plain country folks like us—not that the Gen'ral's so much richer'n we are either, for that matter; but Dorinda don't never seem to care for nothin', an' she's as high an' mighty as a queen. I tell her she ought have been bawn at Grassland with a silver spoon in her mouth.

'Twould just 'bout suit her to sit up all day in the parler with a silk dress on like the Gen'ral's wife an' that young lady from Louisville she saw last Sunday at meetin'. Her name's Pryor, same as the Gen'ral's," she continued, in sudden change of tone; "she's his niece, an' Ole Dilsey says she's come to spend the summer."

Young Greer turned and walked over to the door, holding it for a moment half-open. His mother was making an unpleasant clatter among the dishes, and was apparently preoccupied; but it was evident that she had still something more to say to him.

"There aint no reason why they should hold themselves above us. Eight hundred acres of blue-grass lan' an' between forty an' fifty thousand dollars worth of bank stock aint to be sniffed at, I reckon," she broke forth irritably.

Her son was looking down at the carpet, studying the design as carefully as if his whole future hopes depended upon fixing the peculiar blending of color and the stiff rectangular figures indelibly upon his remembrance.

"I aint complainin' of nothin', Harvey, you understand." She looked up quickly from the waiter she was loading, but could not catch her son's eye. "They're always civil-spoken enough to me," with a toss of her head. "Just las' Sunday the Gen'ral was askin' Micajah when you'd be home. I haven't a doubt he'd like nothin' better than to have you over there time an' again. An' all the while the Gen'ral was talkin' to Micajah, complimentin' him on havin' such a son—not that *I* could see what Micajah ever done for you—I kept my eyes fixed on that beautiful young lady, an' was

sayin' to myself, 'If only Harvey was here to see her, too!'"

But the young man, who had waited patiently until she had reached the climax toward which her monologue had been steadily tending, only answered with a jest and a laugh of complete indifference, as he left the room.

IV.

Harvey Greer walked briskly down the long hall and out into the dazzling sunlight. His hands were in his pockets and he was humming a light and cheerful strain with an air of unconcern; but once out of the house his expression underwent a change. In truth, he was conscious of an unreasoning irritation against this paragon of earthly perfection whose name had been thus twice thrust upon his notice. It was not difficult for him to identify her as a young woman of whom he had already heard much in the East, especially from her Southern admirers at Princeton, four or five years before. The professional beauty type was not one in which he felt an interest. From all that had been told him of her, he had

never once experienced the smallest desire to form her acquaintance, or even to see her, and from the highly colored and effusive descriptions which had been given him, he had drawn his own private conclusions of a by no means flattering order. He pictured her as a big blonde woman with an affected baby stare and a profusion of flaxen hair which had no doubt been tampered with considerably. The knowledge that a being of such rare attractions had actually come to take up her abode in his immediate neighborhood rather bored him, on the whole; at the same time, that she had thus deigned to waste her sweetness, to a certain extent, piqued his curiosity and enlisted his attention.

A young man's violent prejudice, when directed against a young and beautiful woman, is always suggestive of a reaction. Armed as he was

against her, he yet fell to wondering much within himself about her, and expended a good deal more thought upon her than he was willing to allow.

The belle of the White Sulphur, and Newport, and Bar Harbor, must have wearied, then, of her power, he mused. Like a queen, she lays aside her sceptre for an hour.

It entertained him to consider for how many weeks it would probably delight her—this masquerading in the rustic garb of the simple village maid. However, he had but little doubt that long before the summer had begun to wane he would again read of her triumphs and marvelous costumes at the various fashionable resorts, minutely described with a painstaking accuracy in the flowing rhetoric of newspaper phraseology.

This act of retirement from the world for a season was the one thing

he had ever heard of her that interested him in the least; it seemed to argue for her a little more depth and seriousness than he fancied women of her stamp usually possessed.

But he well knew that under the existing circumstances it was most unlikely that he should ever have the opportunity of discovering for himself whether he had judged her correctly or otherwise, there being no social intercourse between his people and the family at Grassland. General Pryor owned one of the most distinguished old country-seats of the blue-grass region—the fertile acres which adjoined his father's farm being included in the estate. In Harvey's innate pride and dignity it never for one instant occurred to him that it would be possible for any one to condescend to him, in any degree whatever, and, moreover, he was just enough to

admit that he had no claims for civilities upon people with whom he had only a very distant acquaintance, and who, in their brief intercourse during his short and unfrequent visits to Kentucky, had manifested toward him always the unfailing courtesy of truly well-bred people. And so, with rather an impatient dismissal, and wearied of the subject, he turned his thoughts into another channel, presently deciding to go in quest of Dorinda, whom, after a considerable search, he found about an hour later coming in from the garden, with a basket of June roses on her arm.

She wore a light-blue gingham gown and a rough straw hat, around which she had wreathed a garland of fresh flowers. There was a warm glow on her cheeks, and she was singing at the top of her strong young lungs. But at the sight of Harvey she broke off in-

stantly, and a look of sullen, fixed displeasure crept into her eyes.

"The top o' the mornin' to you!" he cried, cheerfully, while still some distance off, doffing his hat and waving it aloft with a grand flourish.

As he came nearer she gave him a cool and sweeping glance, a glance which comprehended everything from his air of playful, good-humored indulgence to the perfect cut of his light-gray clothes and altogether immaculate appearance.

"Why, what on earth do you mean by sleeping away the golden hours like this? Dorinda, I'm astonished at you!" he hastened to declare, with a fine show of disapproval, seemingly born of a conscious rectitude. He had consulted his watch a moment before and found that it was nearly ten.

"I got the advantage of you this time," he added, in pretended triumph

and a most lamblike innocence; "I had my breakfast long, long ago," with an expansive wave of the hand, intending to convey the impression of an infinitely remote period of time.

"Good morning, Harvey," the girl answered, in brief disdain, leaning for a moment against the wooden gate and looking steadily away into the distance.

Behind her was the shadowy background of the quaint old-time garden, with its delicious little rows of evenly-cut flower-beds, each hemmed about with a delicate fringe-like border of blue-grass, and mingling delightful perfumes, subtle, evasive, in the languid air. A long-arched, vine-covered trellis divided the plot into two distinct portions, the one being given over to a more substantial cultivation in the way of vegetables and various kitchen plants, the other to fruits and

flowering things—the line of demarkation between the requisite and the luxurious and merely ornamental being thus severely drawn.

Dorinda's attitude was rigid and uncompromising.

But the young man was not to be daunted. He made a low, mock reverence before her and instantly assuming an expression of the most abject contrition, he quickly dropped on one knee at her side.

"Behold, a humble suppliant for your mercy," he muttered in broken, melodramatic accents.

"I won't behold anything of the kind," Dorinda replied, stoutly, steadfastly refusing to deign him so much as a look. "You ought to be ashamed," she asserted, hotly, with a lofty superiority, "not to come down-stairs and eat your breakfast like other folks."

The young man's face took on an

expression of the most pained surprise.

"But I did, Dorinda, I assure you that is precisely what I did; my manner of coming down-stairs and eating the breakfast was quite in the usual method, I think," he protested in the same sorrowful, injured tone, as he continued to kneel before her.

At this, Dorinda turned her head scornfully to one side, and in so doing caught a glimpse of his woeful countenance and tragic posture. Her features slightly relaxed, a sense of the humorous getting the better of her judicial sternness.

"Do get up, Harvey," she insisted, unable to restrain a smile, but still quite high and mighty.

"I can't," he murmured, sadly, "I can not — until you tell me I'm forgiven."

With an impulsive movement, he

reached forth and took one of her slim, brown hands in his, bending his head toward it. He gave a swift, upward glance into her eyes, and then pressed his lips upon the little soft, childish palm with all the air of a knight of old receiving his lady's pardon.

But Dorinda's face grew suddenly whiter than the flowers she wore. She drew back quickly, shivering slightly, as from cold. As the young man sprang, laughing, to his feet, he caught a half-glimpse of the strained, intense, suffering look in her eyes, like some timid, wounded creature in alarm.

Could it be that he had hurt her, he pondered, with his silly jesting, such an odd, incomprehensible little being as she was? He walked for a moment in silence at her side, feeling unpleasantly conscious—through the medium of that subtle, mysterious communica-

tion which is as an added sense to all highly organized temperaments — of the awkwardness that had sprung up between them.

The girl's head was averted, the delicate chin held high; she moved with a firm, proud step. Moreover, she seemed to feel herself under no necessity to attempt to keep up any show of conversation, returning mere monosyllabic replies to her companion's questionings, and manifesting only the meagerest recognition of his presence.

Harvey Greer was somewhat in the habit of studying the people about him, but he found Dorinda altogether baffling.

Presently he noted that she was quickening her footsteps with the evident intention of escaping him. But why should she do that? he considered. Surely he must have offended her in some way unknown to himself.

He could see that she was sensitive and imperious, with but little self-control. But it never seemed possible for him to allow himself to be aroused into the smallest feeling of anger against her, no matter how petulant she should be with him. When they had reached the house, passing from under the thick cluster of evergreen trees and the rows of flowering shrubs at the rear of the building, Harvey planted himself on the door-steps quite in her way, with some feeble hope of restoring things to a more comfortable and friendly basis between them.

"*Don't* go inside, Dorinda; how can you on a day like this?" he cried.

But Dorinda only shook her head with obstinate determination in most provoking fashion.

"I must," she replied steadily, firmly closing her lips. "I have all my work to do," she condescended to explain,

but with a slight tremor in her voice seeing that he kept his eyes fixed upon her in a perplexed, silent scrutiny. She was looking away to a distant point where a flock of sheep was browsing peacefully on the hillside. Shifting from time to time uneasily under his close, prolonged observation, she turned, all at once, and ran quickly up the steps, then paused, faced about, and stood for an instant, hesitating, irresolute, crimsoning painfully.

The young man appeared to take no notice of her embarrassment.

"Your work?" he inquired, incredulously, merely trying to force her into conversation and a possible betrayal of the cause of her very palpable and unflattering desire to avoid him. "And may I be allowed to ask the nature of this most imperative duty? Don't you think it might be postponed for a little while, say until this afternoon or to-

morrow, even? Perhaps I shall not bother you to-morrow again — but to-day," dreamily watching a flight of birds far up in the cloudless sky, and suddenly letting his voice become soft and persuasively tender as he brought his glance slowly back to the little uncertain figure at his side, "to-day I want you, Dorinda," he pleaded, very earnestly, yet not without a faint shade of triumph in his manner, as of one whose cause is already almost won.

"Do look at those deep shadows over there in that grim old woods, and think what a morning we might have together!" he cried, energetically and with boyish warmth. "Seriously, can't you put it off — this work, whatever it is, for a little while, at least?"

Dorinda's eyes wandered pensively away in the direction he indicated, past the orchard and garden and the long fields of rustling corn, far away

to the dim, mysterious forests beyond. The day was growing intensely hot, there was a stifling oppression in the air, and a kind of brazen fury in the glare of the sun.

The thought of cool, shadowy retreats and delicious, soft-flowing waters came to her in an alluring, irresistible reminder. Her throat was dry and parched, and she felt a nervous trembling seize her from the blinding heat.

"Yes," she admitted, slowly, in a very low voice, "I could; I was only going to sew a little. I might put it off until this afternoon."

Harvey was quick to make the most of his opportunity; his sensitive ear detected the softened note in her voice; his eyes, still searching her face, saw the signs of relenting, the sudden yielding of the tense form which seemed to sway and bend toward him, as if held by some strange

influence she was struggling to withstand.

“What a dear thing you are, Dorinda!” he exclaimed, instantly assuming that she had already given her assent. “But really, if you had any idea of how much I want you, you wouldn’t stand there all day letting me beg you, like a hungry dog, for just one little crumb of your notice.”

At his words, slightly aggrieved and chiding, the hot color flamed into her cheeks anew, staining her throat even, in a crimson rush of emotion. The same painful shivering swept over her; her lips trembled, but were silent. She gave a swift, half-frightened look about her, as if meditating flight; then, suddenly, her hands fell limply to her side, as involuntarily she turned her face toward him, swayed by his dominating power, and let her eyes for an instant sink deep into his.

"*Do* you want me, Harvey?" she asked, very humbly.

"Yes, dear, I do want you very much," he said.

Laughing still, he bent his head and met her timid, childish, beseeching look of eagerness and self-mistrust. He did not mean to look at her as a lover—nothing was farther from his thoughts than that there should be any vestige of love-making between them, and yet, something in his glance, something of which he himself was unconscious, perhaps, caused her to draw back from him with quickly lowered eyelids, but radiant, tremulous, and very lovely in her maidenly reserve, her eyes flashing beneath their thick lashes.

Then, without a word or protest, she turned and followed him whithersoever he chose to direct, heedless of the fact that the roses she had just

gathered were left to wither and die on the doorsteps 'neath a scorching sun; unmindful of all the hard lesson she had been striving to commit through the whole long night before, as she tossed restless, wide-eyed, and wretched in her bitter humiliation; forgetful of all and everything whatever save the one supreme, absolutely thrilling, soul-absorbing thought that she was with him, alone—and at his wish.

V.

THE room was spacious, cool, and delightful, presenting an airy picturesqueness of arrangement and a suggestion of luxuriousness charmingly combined, the effect being, perhaps, due more to the subtle atmosphere created by its occupant than to any inherent grace or elegance of appointment.

The hangings were all of a delicate shade of blue, relieved by the snowiest of muslin embroideries about the massive, old-fashioned bedstead, and the wide gilt-framed mirror opposite. Rugs were spread here and there upon the polished floor. There were a few good etchings and water-colors on the walls; and everywhere quaint pieces of old mahogany, with claw

feet and carved legs of exquisite workmanship, which Margaret Pryor delighted in as ancestral relics in which she had an interest, if no further right of proprietorship than that they were allowed to adorn her surroundings during her summer sojourn.

It is interesting to note the characteristic stamp which certain women, if not all, lend to their apartments, even during the briefest period of possession. If Margaret had been placed in a cabin in a wilderness she would have endeavored at once to make it look like the abode of a princess in exile. In her very appearance there was always the association of something rare and costly. Rugs of the finest oriental weaving, delicate bits of bric-a-brac and china from beyond the seas, together with the choicest works of art, seemed only a fitting accompaniment for her brilliant blonde loveliness.

As she lay stretched upon her couch in her loosely clinging mull draperies, her bare arms thrown back of her head, her long hair all unwound and almost entirely enveloping her form, she was like an enchanting, gorgeous, indolent sultana taking her ease among her cushions and laces.

The room was darkened to keep out the afternoon sunlight, which, impatient of such restraint, yet forced an entrance here and there, resting, like the kiss of a lover, upon her firm, white throat and gleaming arms, which but shone to a more dazzling fairness in the glow, just as certain natures attain a more marble-like purity beneath the scorching touch of passion.

In her hand she held a letter bearing a foreign postmark, but the seal was as yet unbroken.

It was evident that she felt but little curiosity in regards to its contents,

since it had remained since yesterday just where she had placed it beneath her pillow, and had only accidentally been brought forth a few moments before in her restless tossings to and fro. It was also apparent, as she toyed with it in abstracted fashion, that the handwriting was entirely familiar to her, for a peculiar smile flitted from time to time across her features, followed by an expression of weariness and indifference.

Presently, with an impatient movement, she turned and, raising herself slightly on one elbow, tore apart the thin envelope and spread out the closely written sheets, pushing back with one large, white, perfect hand the golden strands of hair that fell about her face.

There was a most formal and impressive opening to the letter; set, stereotyped phrases to mark a beginning;

then, with a bold, headlong, spasmodic plunge, the writer seemed to have hurled himself into his subject, inspired by a despairing sink or swim idea which, under the existing circumstances, Margaret found most amusing. She even laughed a little very softly to herself as she read, leaning forward on her elbow. Plainly the young man had only succeeded in destroying his last chance for her favor when he resorted to letter-writing as a means of conveying the ardor of his devotion. And here, be it remarked, by way of parenthesis, he was not the first and only lover to meet with an unsuccessful wooing through an incautious attempt in this most hazardous form of courtship. Margaret was one of those women who attach, perhaps, an undue significance to the general appearance of a letter and its method of expression. She could not recall

that she had ever received a love-letter of any kind or description—and her experience in that line had been rather unusual—that had not more or less astounded her by the author's lack of tact and appreciation of a woman's nature.

But in this instance, under all the clumsily framed sentences, ludicrously interspersed here and there with sundry boyish slang expressions characteristic of the writer, now and again a sentence caught her eye which seemed to contain the ring of true feeling, and which brought a look of gravity into her eyes. This momentary seriousness, however, was altogether impersonal; she had read the letter from beginning to end entirely unmoved.

When she had finally refolded it and restored it to its envelope, she lay for some moments very quietly framing her reply. After all, there seemed little

left for her to say to Mr. Edward Leeds Van Ousten, at present amusing himself in Paris, since she had no less than half a dozen times already given him her final, irrevocable answer. Moreover, it appeared to her unpardonably out of taste that he should presume thus far with her, since she had made her meaning so plain. There is an instinct of cruelty slumbering in the hearts of all women alike, even the tenderest and most sincere. But Margaret Pryor was not of the type that could be readily described as tender-hearted—though she had often felt the tears spring to her eyes when she had accidentally put her foot upon a flower—neither was she altogether sincere, being in character somewhat elusive and inconsistent. Thus far in her existence, emotion had taken the form of sentiment merely. Furthermore, she was, to a considerable degree,

romantic, with but little appreciation of the offering of a commonplace affection.

At the same time she was by no means insensible of the worth, from a worldly standpoint, of what she had disdained. The writer of the letter was a wealthy young New Yorker, whom she had met the previous winter while visiting friends in the East. Social importance, a career of great brilliancy and scope could be hers, if she so desired, and yet something within herself, some incomprehensible force, which had not as yet been crushed, made the possession of mere material things seem wholly insufficient.

The only effect of her lover's missive was to arouse an old restlessness which had been growing upon her of late. She felt that she had finally come to a time in her life when there was a necessity for some kind of a change, even

though it should be to a worse condition, as if she had breathed up all the oxygen in the air about her, and was in consequence stifled and oppressed. She felt a tremendous striving in her toward some great crisis of awakening, a longing for the opportunity to feel to the utmost, to meet life face to face in all its reality and tragic interpretation, to know whether or not she were able to love, to suffer, and, if need be, to die for the sake of one supreme end—a deep, eternal devotion. For the extent of her own powers had not been tested, and thus far she remained a mystery, even to herself.

After a time she rose languidly from her pillows and began to move softly about the room, pausing mechanically now and again to straighten some ornament or picture, the delicate curves of her lips compressed in thought.

The door of her bedroom was ajar, and from the distance a voice floated to her, a woman's voice crooning a sweet and drowsy air, as if hushing a little child to sleep. Margaret waited an instant to listen, holding in one hand the folds of the curtain, and leaning her head in a tired fashion against the side of the door. The voice continued singing, but in snatches, breaking off now and then as if one had paused to bend over a little cot to smooth a stray curl into place, or to murmur some tender word, unintelligible except to baby ears. There was a strange allurements in the voice, though it possessed but meager power, and its little twilight slumber-song sounded as sweet as some long-forgotten harmony to the jaded ears of the woman of the world who had heard all the classic music of Europe and her own country. Margaret moved a step or two into the hall. But

the song came more fitfully now, and then finally died away. She could hear Mrs. Pryor moving in a subdued way about the room as she approached the nursery.

"Ada," she said, standing an instant in the doorway and taking in the pretty scene, "how I wish you could sing me to sleep just as you have done little Elsie; I am very tired."

At the first sound of a step upon the carpetless floor, a plump, dark-haired woman in a becoming organdie tea-gown much befrilled, with tiny bows of pink ribbon up and down the front, turned with a pleasant smile of welcome from a fairy-like bed in one corner of the room about which she had been arranging the curtains. She was rather a pretty woman, with certain matronly little airs that were delightful. The fact that she was some thirty years younger than her

husband perhaps added to the thought of youthfulness which one always associated with her. Her mouth, that most characteristic feature, was wide and sweet, revealing rows of rarely beautiful teeth. She came forward to meet Margaret, cautiously pointing one finger over her shoulder in the direction of the little sleeper, smiling still, and silent.

Margaret sat down in a low chair. "I am very tired," she repeated, presently, letting her hands fall wearily to her side.

Mrs. Pryor regarded her for an instant with the amiable, patient scrutiny with which she would have attended the woes of Edward or May or little Elsie.

"Tired, are you, dear?" she said, sympathetically. "I was afraid the country would seem dull to you; in fact I knew it would, after all the gay-

ety you have had. But won't you let me ask some people? You know I wanted to invite a few friends, but you wouldn't let me. I had arranged a very charming house-party for the tenth. We were to have a poet, and an artist, and a young novelist—Kentuckians are becoming famous, you know—and a dozen or more besides who are not famous, but very pleasant people to have in one's house. Really I don't wonder you find it lonely here. You need variety, every one needs variety. You can't think how dreary it all seemed to me at first. I was simply wretched if the house was not filled with people all the time. You know the first year after my marriage we spent the entire winter here, and I almost lost my mind. But the summers were very nearly as bad, at first. I think it was the sound of the crickets and katydids that drove me to distrac-

tion. I could never make General Pryor understand. He said he liked the sound. And, do you know, now that I have grown accustomed to it, I don't so much mind; there is a great deal in getting accustomed to things," she added with a sigh. "But I think it is the children that make everything seem different to me. Sometimes I can believe that the whole face of the earth is changed."

She threw a tender, beautiful glance toward the corner of the room where a little brown curly head lay peacefully on its pillow.

Margaret looked up quickly.

"Perhaps that does make the difference," she answered, softly.

"It makes all the difference in the world," the elder woman asserted, confidently.

"But I am not quite sure," Margaret continued, "if it would make all the dif-

ference to me. May be I am not a truly womanly woman."

"My dear, you are one of the most womanly women I have ever known; think how the children all adore you, and how lovely you always are to them. But how is it possible that you should understand some things?" And again her eyes wandered away to the corner with that look in them which holds such boundless, wonderful depths of meaning.

Margaret made a sudden gesture, and leaned forward.

"Ada," she said in a low voice, "I am going to ask you a question. Forgive me if I hurt you and do not answer unless you wish."

Mrs. Pryor shrank back a little with an instinctive movement. Something in Margaret's face caused her heart to quicken its beats. It had beat more calmly of late.

"I will tell you anything that you wish," she answered, yet looking steadily away.

"Then tell me this: Do you think, if a woman should make a compromise, —I mean in reference to marriage," hesitating, and choosing her words with difficulty, "there could ever come a time when she would not look back to the old illusions and broken dreams with longing and regret; that life could really be worth the living without love, given unreservedly and with all the strength of one's nature? Do you think—"

She broke off abruptly, fearful lest she might have gone too far. She was breathing hurriedly, and her eyes had grown dark, luminous, and very earnest.

Mrs. Pryor rose and walked over to the window. She pulled aside the muslin curtain and stood for some

moments, without replying, looking down upon the broad acres of richest blue grass stretching out before her. She had grown very pale and there was a sadness unutterable written on her features. It was a look which one woman seldom allows another to witness, through pride and instinctive reserve. But she knew that Margaret had spoken thus to her from no idle or unworthy impulse, and, moreover, with her she had never at any time in that intimacy which had so long existed between them attempted concealment. Presently she turned. Her voice was tremulous when she spoke, and her lips quivered; a pallor had spread over her face; she looked no longer young without the accompaniment of her usual airy grace of manner.

“At first,” she whispered huskily drawing a step nearer, “at first —”

There was a fluttering movement of

outstretched arms from the cot in the corner, a sleepy, lisping call, and Mrs. Pryor, with a little cry of delight and a look of radiant motherhood, gathered her baby into her arms.

VI.

If Harvey had really counted upon Dorinda as a companion during the weeks of his vacation, as he had said, he was beginning to discover not only that there were forces in her the most puzzling and contradictory, but also that she was a very uncertain dependence. There were times, when for no reason that he was able to divine, she would meet his suggestions for their mutual enlivenment with a sullen, point-blank refusal which seemed based upon no grounds of offense whatever. His manner toward her at these times, if wholly irreproachable in its intent, was yet of a nature too gentle, too courteously calm in its perfect self-control, to bring about the friendly unconstraint for which he strove. Perhaps the fact that

he always met her childish outbreaks with an air of pained surprise, but without the smallest show of resentment, did more than anything toward bringing her into a state of docility. That recognition of a reserved power, the iron hand in the velvet glove, to a certain species of femininity is generally effective. And it is the proudest of women always whose subjection is the most complete. At all events, the rebellious flashes which often a mere word or tone of voice unexpectedly called forth became more rarely indulged in, although there were still whole days when she avoided him so successfully that he could not obtain so much as a glimpse of the wayward little being, the fluttering wings of whose soul seemed ever beating against some invisible bars of restraint, and whose impulses, as likely to be of the most heroic order of self-sacrifice as of a petulant exaction,

afforded the charm of a constant variety.

It was on such an occasion, when she had left him to his own resources, that one day, several weeks after his return, during a long ramble, he finally directed his steps aimlessly through the well-remembered vistas of the dense oak forest adjoining his father's farm.

It had been a delight of his childhood to ponder upon the story that had often been told him of this land. The tradition was that, long ago, the ancestor of the Pryors, who first owned that immense tract of several thousand acres of which the "Oak Woods" was a part, had pacified the Indians he found upon it for the loss of their happy hunting ground by the gift of an old rifle; the later historic knowledge of land-grants from Virginia, by which means only such vast posses-

sions could have been obtained, served in no way to detract from the picturesqueness of the incident. Here, as a boy, under these rustling trees he had spent whole days of blissful content, devouringly reading one of Cooper's novels and fancying that behind every bush a red-skin lurked.

He smiled a little sadly to himself for those vanished hours. Perhaps he had come to realize that the danger lurking behind bushes was a reality, and no longer a pleasing figment of the imagination.

When he had reached a point where a little stream ran through the wood, just beneath a thick copse on the hillside, he suddenly paused, and all the wild enchantment of the forest, shadow-haunted, breeze-stirred, burst upon his senses.

A stillness inexpressible was over everything. When now and again an

acorn fell to the ground the sound bore a ghostly, ominous suggestion so that one involuntarily started in alarm. The slanting rays of sunlight penetrating the grove seemed only to heighten the pervading twilight, and seldom was there a foot-fall to break the silence of its remoteness. The farm-hands moving to and fro had no occasion to pass through it, and it had been allowed to remain, as it had been for countless ages, undisturbed. Harvey was just beginning to enjoy that agreeable sensation of complete isolation, rarely experienced in our restless, latter-day civilization, when a woman's voice joined with a child's shrill treble broke upon his ears.

Amazed that any one had penetrated to the retreat, and not a little annoyed at the interruption, he turned and moved in the direction of the voices. He had only a short distance to go.

The disturbers of his serenity were plainly visible through the trees.

A few yards beyond, partially concealed by the dense undergrowth, a child of six or seven had climbed from the low crotch of an old tree into an excellent swing formed by the wild grapevines that grew around it. Near the bole of the tree a tall young woman in a white gown was standing, alternately remonstrating with the boy for his daring and sharing in his merriment.

Presently she uttered a quick cry of fright and held out both her arms in entreaty, at the same time darting a startled glance over her shoulder, hearing the approaching footsteps. But her alarm only called forth a gleeful shout of triumph from the child, who, having now abandoned his swing, was trying his prowess in another direction and soon scrambled completely out of

reach at the imminent risk of life and limb.

Seeing his danger, and fearful lest she might cause him a misstep by the utterance of so much as a word, the young woman was standing speechless and aghast as Harvey drew near. He came quickly forward, realizing the situation at a glance.

"Allow me," he said, briefly, with a hurried bow. In another moment he had deposited the wriggling and ireful young gentleman in safety at her feet.

His action in the matter was so very prompt, marked with such a pleasing touch of humorous appreciation and at the same time so carelessly free from all embarrassment, she regarded him for an instant with a veiled curiosity and interest. Moreover, he was unmistakably a gentleman, as was evident from his bearing and appearance.

But as she lifted her face, which all

the while had been held slightly to one side, occupied as she was with the child, and turned smiling, grateful, and very gracious toward him, the light, laughing speech upon his lips died suddenly away and a strange look crept into her eyes.

It was for him a moment of bewilderment, of intensified emotion. But where had he seen that face before?

All at once the dim old forest seemed to fade away from his sight and he beheld himself in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York listening to one of the Wagner operas. As a reality the brilliant auditorium with its tiers upon tiers of faces, the women in their dazzling evening toilets, the twinkling of jewels, and the fluttering of many fans, rose before him in perfect distinctness. The sound of the orchestra was in his ears and his heart was beating tremendously under the glance

of a woman's eyes—the eyes of the woman he now beheld burning deep into his very soul.

It was but for the briefest instant—impelled by some irresistible magnetic force which swayed them both—that she had turned toward him, a total stranger, that night in New York, as he suddenly lifted his head and saw her sitting in one of the neighboring boxes, marvelously lovely in her white gown, without ornament of any kind. Like the golden-haired visions of his dreams and seen through mist, she appeared to him with her parted lips and gleaming arms. With a kind of savage triumph he recalled the sudden stirring of the pulses he had known when she met his glance and his eyes looked deep into her eyes, as she involuntarily lifted them to his amid the clashing of musical instruments and the uproar of applause when the cur.

tain fell. What mattered it, if flushing painfully, in another second she had turned proudly away. Through some power, outside and beyond them both, her soul had responded to his and had yielded to him, and he felt in his strength and victory, by the divine right of recognition, that she was eternally his in spite of whatever wind of destiny should waft her from him.

With startling recollection there now returned to him a stanza from Browning's "Cristina" which that night seemed to him to be written just for them :

" Doubt you if, in some such moment, as she fixed
me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed, here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages : while the true
end sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love way, with some other
soul to mingle?"

And how those other lines had

tangled themselves in his thoughts as he strode out into the darkness! —

“There are flashes struck from midnights, there
are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish, whereby swollen
ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse, which for
once had play unstified,
Seems the sole work of a life-time that away the
rest have trifled.”

But all that had happened four years before, on the evening before his departure for Europe. Since that time she had never once crossed his path, her very name even being unknown to him. Gradually it had come about that she haunted his thoughts and fired his imagination as an elusive being, forever beyond his grasp, shadowy, mystical, a creature of his own wild fantasy, an impalpable illusion. Now that she stood at last actually before him in the flesh, his brain reeled and his tongue refused him utterance.

Margaret's low voice was sounding in his ears; but speech seemed only useless. The forest was a place of enchantment. The beautiful, golden-haired woman, the realization of an ideal called up by some magic art. His heart beat as if trying to leap to her, and all his pulses throbbed into one great beat of joy. The requisite, commonplace words he must offer seemed almost a desecration.

"Will you permit me to introduce myself, Miss Pryor?" he managed to say at length. "My name is Greer—Harvey Greer," he added, in slight hesitation.

Margaret was looking at him with an intent, thoughtful expression in her eyes.

"I think," she said, presently, growing restive under his gaze, and putting up one hand to her head with a puzzled gesture as of one trying to recall an

impression, painful in its dimness, "I must surely have met you before, Mr. Greer—somewhere—some time—can you help me to remember—or have you, also, forgotten?"

The question, so lightly asked, roused him as by a rude shock.

Had then 'the world's honors, in derision, trampled out the light forever'?

With a certain bitterness the lines came back to him again.

"Oh, I remember now," she cried, quickly, a hot flush stealing over her face. I saw you at the opera one night in New York four years ago. We were listening to 'Lohengrin,' and those stupid people applauded at the wrong time. I could never forget your expression, as I accidentally caught your eye; you looked all the disapprobation that I felt. It was quite a long, long time ago—four years—have you forgotten?"

But the young man was thinking of "Cristina," and for a moment he did not reply.

VII.

He could never afterwards recall what he said to her, if indeed he spoke any word whatever, when suddenly, with a swift movement, he threw back his head and looked her boldly in the eyes with a slow, searching gaze which seemed to toss aside by a single stroke all the barriers of formality she would raise between them.

But she met his glance unflinchingly, her lips slightly parted in that serene, beautiful smile of hers which enthralled and bewildered like some magic draught from the strange mist-wine.

When, through an inferred permission, merely suggested by voice and manner, he found himself, a moment later, walking by her side, their steps tending out of the forest, the child

flitting on ahead, now in pursuit of a bright-winged butterfly, now pausing to gather a wild flower near the path, he still felt under the influence of a dream the awakening from which he longed to postpone. Presently he began to realize that there was something permeating in the power of her presence, and was dumbly conscious that the wild, poetic fancies he was weaving about her would one day cling to him and burn, like the touch of fire.

He did not dare to trust himself again to look at her, except briefly from time to time, as she moved in her calm perfection at his side, self-poised and stately as a young goddess who yet deigns to be gracious.

There was about her that subtlest form of allurements a woman may ever possess: The art to interest and baffle, through an intimation of a certain

loftiness of ideal in which there is always implied less of coldness than of pride.

“Yet she could love, those eyes declare,
Were men but nobler than they are,”

was a thought, which, in one degree or another, she seemed invariably to inspire, and in which lay her greatest strength. Moreover, there was in her manner something crystal-like and remote in its tranquility, and added to this she had the dignity to clothe her lightest speech with a tinge of subtlety in which there always lurked a hint of a deeper meaning than the words conveyed. Harvey felt this when she spoke.

“Do you know what I was thinking of a moment ago, Mr. Greer, when you suddenly sprang out of space to my assistance, like the hero of a novel? I was thinking how odd it would be if such a thing should really happen. It

is especially strange that the idea should have crossed my brain just at that particular instant when you appeared, since these woods are my favorite haunt, and never before have I encountered here a human being."

"At least I can have the gratification, then, of knowing that my presence upon the scene was not wholly inopportune and unexpected," Harvey answered slowly with the utmost seriousness.

"Are you really a hero, Mr. Greer?" she asked with a delightful assumption of naïveté, regarding him a trifle curiously still, as if he had literally sprung out of space, as she had said. It was evident that she was finding it rather a difficult matter to account for him, but her breeding was too excellent for her to seem to desire any information in regard to his identity which he himself did not choose to offer. "Are you

really a hero?" she asked, lifting her lovely eyes to his. Harvey smiled a little at first at the inquiry; but he grew, all at once, very grave as he answered:

"Perhaps I could be, under a certain inspiration," he said quietly, meeting her eyes.

She turned quickly aside for a moment to extricate her white gown, which was of a thin and airy material, and continually catching in some thorn or bramble. Under the thick foliage of the wood there was no need of protection from the sun, and she had removed her large garden hat, the blue ribbons of which she was twisting thoughtfully in her fingers. Now and then a stray beam, darting through the branches, fell upon her uncovered head, and transformed it into a shining mass with its Midas touch. Perhaps the consciousness of this effect in some way provoked her next remark.

"Do you remember," she mused, "the old legend of the statue made of clay that stood for an hour in the sunlight, and so seemed purest gold? I saw a very pretty application of the idea once to the 'gilded hour' of a lover, 'the hero but to one,' " she added with a sudden transposition.

"But he was not a true lover, he was as counterfeit as the statue, if he were content with merely the glory of an hour," Harvey broke in.

There was a lingering note of sweetness in her voice.

"It would be something to have lived, if only for an hour," she said, dreamily, looking beyond him to where the sunlight slept on the crest of the hill. For a moment he was silent. But how her words thrilled and roused him! He was young, and she was so very beautiful; what wonder that his pulses throbbed and his heart-beats quickened?

"Why do you speak as if the limitation were inevitable?" he cried, hotly. "Suppose the sun shines on in all its strength — throughout the whole long perfect day — suppose —"

A peculiar smile flitted for an instant across her features.

"The sunlight always dies."

Then, as if realizing that she had allowed the conversation to drift farther away than was becoming from the conventionality it is necessary to maintain with an entire stranger, she changed the subject quite abruptly, at the same time calling to her side the child, who was only a few yards ahead, and who came running up, roguish and breathless. He had been catching butterflies, and held one gingerly between his taut thumb and forefinger as he drew near. Margaret bent her head over the chubby brown fist.

"Oh, you hurt it — the poor little but-

terfly — see, you have broken its wing!" she exclaimed, chidingly.

"This one in this hand's deader still," lisped the boy, triumphantly, extending the palm of his left hand, in which the dead butterfly lay.

Margaret turned away with a little look of pain.

"How cruel all children are!" she said, dropping the small hand. Conscious of the triteness of the remark, the young man put in, tentatively, "If I have not been misinformed, there is another class of beings who have also something of a reputation in that line."

Margaret looked steadily at him for a moment — with the look which seemed to read and comprehend so much in the clearness of its insight. But she chose to appear to misunderstand his reference.

"Oh, of course; children are only

men in miniature," she replied, quietly parrying the thrust.

"To-day this little fellow breaks a butterfly's wing, and twenty or thirty years hence, perhaps, he will break a woman's heart — who knows?"

"But might you not reverse the idea, and be even more prophetic?"

"Men's hearts never break," she answered, with the same fine, cool smile of dismissal with which he was becoming familiar.

They had reached the gate leading into the grounds surrounding the house, glimpses of which could be seen through the trees. It was a large, square, red-brick structure of the colonial style of architecture, with that pleasing suggestion of solid respectability and antiquity which most houses of this order present. Harvey had always admired the place as one of those grand old estates of Kentucky which

are either slowly falling into decay or changing hands to unappreciative owners on account of the continual shifting of fortunes from one man's purse to that of another.

"It is truly a delightful old place," he exclaimed with enthusiasm, regarding it with the look of curiosity with which one surveys a well-remembered object after a long absence. He held the gate open for her to enter, bowing low as she passed; but he himself paused on the outside and came no farther as the wide portal swung on its hinges.

"I can remember what an imposing structure I thought it when I used to pass it as a boy, hunting in the woods below," he continued, still looking up the avenue.

Margaret glanced at him in surprise; she had not thought of him as a resident of the neighborhood. During the

course of their conversation, after various conjectures, she had finally arrived at a conclusion in regard to him which she considered very plausible. She supposed him to be, judging from one thing and another, one of the young literati from the East, who was probably making a tour of the Blue-Grass Region with the view of preparing an article for one of the magazines. She thought he had quite the look of a man who might write articles for the magazines. Moreover, she was acquainted with the general character of the population of the county, and there was positively no one, so far as she knew, who answered to the description of the scholarly-looking young man whose clothes bore the unmistakable stamp of a London tailor, and whose bearing and manner was that of a thorough man of the world. It seemed odd to her that she had never met him, or even

heard his name mentioned in her uncle's house, where such broad hospitality was extended. She, however, felt sure there must be some explanation of this.

Following the direction of his eyes, she fancied that she interpreted his thought.

"It is almost a conversion to the law of primogeniture, isn't it, the fact that so many of the beautiful old places of Kentucky are passing out of the name? It would really grieve me, very seriously, if my uncle should ever sell this place. With all our boasted preference for the free democratic principles of our country, I am not sure but that, with some of us, there are not certain fixed, inborn, aristocratic tendencies which can never be rooted out."

The young man winced a little beneath her words. How thoroughly

patrician she was! And in that moment there came to him the first painful realization of his life that the origin from which he had sprung might prove a stumbling-block in the way of gaining his desires.

Margaret could not fail to see the shadow that flitted across his face, though she was unable to fathom its cause. She was a woman with whom tact was regarded as a virtue, and she had for an instant the uncomfortable sense of having conversed perhaps a little too freely with a stranger. Harvey had seemed, all at once, to lose interest in the old, ancestral pile of brick, and was looking now somewhat wistfully, in the direction of the woods from which they had just emerged.

"I was thinking," he said slowly, after a time, and in a complete change tone, "how odd it is that I should have met you, after all those years, in

the one spot of all others I would have selected, if I had had my wish."

Under his burning look Margaret drew herself up a little proudly.

"It is rather a sudden shifting of scenes, is it not?" she answered, lightly. "First the Metropolitan Opera House of New York, and then a primeval forest of Kentucky. Fate evidently intended the effect to be heightened by contrast—with a clever, theatric kind of management. But at least it was a kindly stroke that sent you to me to-day."

"Will you let me believe that you do really mean that?" he asked, in a low voice.

She was leaning languidly against one of the gate-posts, looking down upon him where he stood several feet below her on the sloping ground, and she was smiling, always smiling, though his manner was so grave and earnest,

"I will tell you what I mean, when we meet again," she answered, presently. And with that, seeing that he was keeping her standing, he was forced to take his leave, which he did a moment later, bowing low before her.

When once he had passed out of sight, he suddenly changed his course and plunged straight into the heart of the woods. With the instinct of all finer natures, whose highest emotions have been stirred, he felt an imperative need for solitude.

Almost mechanically, his feet led him to the spot where they had met so short a time before, since when an eternity of feeling and of change had elapsed. Throwing himself upon the grass—the grass her feet had pressed—he lay for hours, his arms thrown back of his head, his eyes half closed, listening to the wind in the branches

of the old tree which had sheltered her loveliness and whose mysterious whisperings were all of her.

By and by, when the fierce tumult in his veins began to subside a little, he grew to look upon the spot as a sort of shrine, and had all kinds of hallowed thoughts about it. With that last look of hers upon him which had thrilled him to the very heart's center, he would have regarded it as a profanation to hold immediate converse with any other human being, however dear to him. And so he remained there, heedless of the drifting hours, dreaming, reverent, and impassioned — yet not wholly clear in all the strange fancies that flitted through his brain, as one whose sight has become dimmed from gazing too long at the sun — until the long, bright summer day had begun to wane, and twilight, with stealthy footstep and shadowy garments, had glided, a dark

phantom, through the lonely wold.
 And all that time, whatever difficulties
 might hereafter obtrude themselves
 upon him, she was his—his beloved,
 the Ideal, the Perfect Realization; and
 he, her lover, untrammelled and abso-
 lutely blessed, was a poet, because of
 the height to which he had risen
 through "the might of one fair face."

VIII.

The light wind, stealing in through the open windows, stirred the embroidered muslin curtains in the cool breakfast room at Grassland and played with the bows of lavender ribbon on Mrs. Pryor's pretty morning gown.

The repast, characterized by the usual elaborateness of a Kentucky breakfast, had been ended for some moments, and the children had gone to their play. Their sweet, young voices floated in, from time to time, and mingled with the songs of birds and the breath of flowers. Margaret had just left the room. With a smile and a nod of the head in the direction of that young woman's retreating figure, Mrs. Pryor suddenly turned to her husband :

"I have been thinking that we should surely do something to enliven her, and lo, without any help of mine, the diversion has already come!"

The delicately-arched brows were perceptibly elevated, and she wore the smiling look of one who imparts an amusing communication.

Whom do you think," bending forward on her elbows and letting her voice fall, "she met yesterday in the Oak Woods in most romantic fashion?"

Not possessing a very lively and fertile imagination, and being but little interested, the General merely vouchsafed a brief glance from over his newspaper and declined to conjecture.

"The son of your old post-and-railer friend, as you call him, young Greer—Harvey Greer; isn't that his name? Margaret mentioned the occurrence to me in her usual careless way. She said that Edward had given her *such* a fright

climbing up into one of the trees and positively refusing to come down, and that this young man, who happened to be walking in the woods at the time, saw her predicament and came to the rescue. She spoke quite indifferently, but I could plainly see that she was interested, more interested than I have seen her in any one for years. It was either that, or she is pining for another conquest. A woman like Margaret grows accustomed to being worshipped and doesn't exactly know how to get on without it."

"Humph!"

The General put down his newspaper and pushed back his eyeglasses. He was a large, heavily-built man of about sixty years of age, but still vigorous and remarkably fine-looking. His iron-gray moustache and his hair a shade whiter were abundant; his eyes had the clear, spirited look of healthfulness

and intellectual strength. In manner he was bluff, but kindly, and always courteous; and when he did not quote Latin — being a man of scholarly habits — and did not weary one with reminiscences of the civil war, he was as agreeable and charming an old gentleman as one is likely to encounter. Thoroughly aristocratic in all of his tastes and ideas, he had yet the most ardent admiration for the new type of Southerner — a type whose presence is rapidly becoming so widely felt in the land. Being entirely self-made and living upon no record of the deeds of their ancestors, he regarded such men as the very bone and sinew of the South, and rested all his hopes for the future upon the aspiration of this class. He had, moreover, an especial interest in young Harvey Greer whom he considered a living example of his theory.

He accordingly pushed back his

glasses and laid aside his paper with less reluctance than he ordinarily displayed at an interruption, seeing that the young man was the subject of the conversation.

"A fine young fellow! A remarkably fine young fellow!" he exclaimed, leaning back in his chair. "I should like him to be invited here, to my house, my table, and I hope you will see to it at once — as soon as it is convenient to you, my dear," he added in a tone in which there was blended an amusing commingling of conciliation and command.

Mrs. Pryor reached forth a hand and gathered one of the long-stemmed roses from the cut-glass bowl on the table. It was some time before she replied. Apparently she was revolving in her mind a subject of considerable importance.

"Margaret has not the remotest idea of his parentage," she suggested, at

length, toying abstractedly with the delicate petals of the flower.

“What if she hasn’t, what if she hasn’t?” the general broke in, gruffly. “But I’ve no doubt you’ll take it upon yourself to enlighten her, being a woman and your head filled with all the foolish notions of your sex in such matters. Old Micajah Greer is as upright and as respected a man as there is in the whole of Fayette County, and he is a gentleman, too—*‘Montani semper liberi’*—for the matter of that. As for his son,” and the general brought his large fist down upon the table with an emphasis, “I’ve got just this much to say about that: Any — young — woman that has been having about her the brainless fops and numbskulls that help to make up that assembly of idiots known as society, and can then find fault with a *manly, educated* young fellow like Harvey Greer—is unworthy

of his notice! Yes, unworthy of his notice, I say!" he vociferated, waxing more and more wroth and growing very red in the face through the mere force of his own utterance, as he went on in his declamatory style.

There can be no limiting of the oratorical flights to which he might have ascended, having been warmed into an enthusiastic reminder of his favorite theme and roused into a state of indignation at the bare insinuation of a disparagement to young Greer, had not his wife suddenly cut short his eloquence by remarking quite mildly:

"But Margaret has not found the smallest fault with him whatever."

Mrs. Pryor could with difficulty restrain a smile at her husband's vehemence. In truth he was simply playing into her hands, for, in the course of the conversation, she had arrived at a conclusion which she meant strictly to adhere

to, and that was to offer no explanation regarding the young man further than she was absolutely compelled to and merely allow matters to take their own course. She had also a certain feeling of curiosity as to the result of these revelations, if they should be postponed. Sooner or later, she argued, it was inevitable that Margaret should know all there was to be known about him, as it was evident that the General, now that the subject had once been brought up, meant to offer him every courtesy.

She had no doubt that any overtures they might make would be accepted, and the end of it all, in spite of any interference on her part, would be that he would assuredly fall in love with Margaret. She had seen so many instances of the power of this young woman's beauty and charm, and she believed the circumstances were such that she could do little to prevent the usual catas-

trophe. She, therefore, concluded that nothing could be gained by disclosing the origin of Harvey Greer, except perhaps a loss of interest on the part of Margaret herself, whose ideas upon the subject of heredity and caste she well knew were considerably strained. As to the young man himself she could not stifle a certain feeling of regret and pity. But there seemed nothing to do but to assent to her husband's wishes and invite him to the house on the following Friday evening, when she was arranging a dinner for twelve.

"I expect some people the last of the week. Is it your wish that we should include him also?" she asked, with the air of one who slips lightly from under the weight of an unpleasant responsibility.

"Yes; just as good a time as any. Invite him then; invite him then." The General's answer was final and decisive.

"On your own head be it then, if he

falls in love with Margaret," Mrs. Pryor answered, laughing, as she rose from the table. But she could not altogether subdue a conscientious pang of remorse for those ruthless Juggernautal wheels whose revolvings even now were plainly visible to her mind's eye.

"‘*Et in Arcadia ego,*’" the General quoted with a smile, again restored to his customary good humor by his wife's acquiescence.

IX.

When, a few days later, Mrs. Pryor's note of invitation was received—one of those elegant and airily gracious missives in which she especially excelled—Harvey Greer was in his room bending over a table piled high with books which he had that morning unpacked.

As a natural reaction, the state of exalted delight inspired by that bewildering meeting in the forest had been followed by a somber depression of spirits, and, to a considerable degree, the glamor of the enchantment had been forced to give place to the common light of reality.

When should he see her again? It was the one question he continually asked himself, which he seemed to breathe with every breath he drew,

but to which, on account of the peculiar conditions by which he was encompassed, he was able to find no response.

But how those words of hers—"I shall tell you when we meet again"—how they rang in his ears and tortured him with their suggestion of possibilities he felt himself powerless to effect! Of a nature not easily daunted, and from being accustomed to take things before him with a certain bold, free grace that was essentially his, he had heretofore gone to meet whatever obstacles he found in his path with a confidence that had led to easy victory. Believing, as so many have believed in the pride of their brave young manhood, that man is the molder of his own destiny, he had always felt that with courage, energy, and patience all things might yet be his—all things of earth, and

sky, and light, and truth. And in those moments of a deeper seriousness and more sacred communing with his own thoughts, when there had floated before him that shadowy vision of the Ideal, before whose shrine all men, whether secretly or otherwise, worship, it had ever been the cardinal tenet of his faith that if love were strong enough, pure enough, perfect enough in itself, it must surely attain its object by the very force of its own divine strength.

But to-day, as he bent gloomily over the book before him—a profoundly exhaustive treatise on a “Theory of the Will”—vainly attempting to lose himself in the mass of dogma and conflicting opinions therein set forth, there had seemed all at once to come to him, in the shock of a painful surprise, a complete recognition of the barriers which separated him from the

woman who, above all others, had fired his imagination and woven about him a spell so mystic and irresistible that her beauty still encompassed him as if present to his sight. The "Theory of the Will" offered but little balm to his troubled spirit, and, though he had been reading steadily for the past two hours or more, the painful undercurrent of an ever-present dejection made it difficult for him to fix his attention. However, he was thus afforded an excellent opportunity for a practical illustration of his powers of concentration, and whether or not he was enjoying the experiment, he looked up, with a movement of impatience, as the sound of footsteps, hurrying up the stairs in the direction of his room, drew steadily nearer.

There was a loud, impetuous knock from outside, and almost before he could make any response the door was

flung wide and his mother stood in the entrance. In his first glance at her excited countenance he realized that she was the bearer of some important communication. He placed a chair for her with his usual deliberateness, and, forcing into his manner an expression of gratification at her presence, which he was at that moment unable to feel as genuinely as he could have wished, he stood waiting, with most respectful attention, for her to begin.

She had been making strawberry preserves, and had left her boiling kettle in great haste to deliver in person a large, square, cream-colored envelope which she had a moment before taken from the messenger as he passed the kitchen window, and which, with a look of speechless triumph, she now brought forth from among the folds of her crumpled cotton apron. Her sleeves were rolled high above the

elbow, showing her bare, freckled arms, stained here and there with the crimson fruit. She held the outstretched note charily between the tips of her fingers, as if fearful of leaving a mark upon it.

"Just look at that, Harvey!" she exclaimed, still breathless from her quick mounting of the long stair, leaning back and smiling complacently. "What'd I tell Micajah no more'n two nights ago when he was a-goin' over again for the twentieth time all them fine things the Gen'ral said about you. I sez, Micajah, sez I, they'll be after him in less'n a week; see if they ain't." Then she added, with a change of tone, her voice suddenly falling from its shrill, boastful key to its customary curtness, "Ole Dilsey's boy, Dave, from over at Grassland, just brought it. He come on horseback, an' says they tole him to wait for an answer."

The young man's face flushed deeply. Without a word he came forward, took the note and, walking over to where his desk stood in one corner of the room, sat down before it. But he did not break the seal at once. A tumult of feeling was surging in him. For the moment he completely forgot that he was not alone, in the swift commingling of confused emotions. Then, becoming suddenly conscious that his mother's eyes were bent curiously upon him and that she was still waiting, he opened the envelope and read the message.

If Mrs. Greer had anticipated the manifestation of any delight at its contents she was destined to meet with a cruel disappointment. A surprised, baffled look came into her eyes, alertly eager, and still keenly fixed upon every movement of her son, who was now gathering together

his materials for writing with an air of unconcern.

Presently he turned toward her.

"Don't let me keep you waiting," he said, "I will attend to this."

Seeing that she still remained seated, he drew toward him one of the scattered sheets of paper and quickly framed a reply. But there was a sternness in his manner that forbade all questioning when he finally came forward.

His mother had now risen and was standing near the table in the center of the room waiting for the note to be finished. All the pride, all the hope had utterly gone out of her face. She looked older by ten good years in the loss of that buoyant expectation which has lent a momentary glow to her careworn features. Yet so much of wistfulness and regret still remained that the

young man was moved to a brief explanation.

"The note is from Mrs. Pryor," he quietly volunteered. "She asks me to dine at Grassland on Friday evening at eight o'clock."

"An' you didn't go an' say you wouldn't do it, did you?" she screamed. "Mercy on us, Harvey, what could you be a-thinkin' of? Not that *I* don't know we're just as good as they are, every whit an' grain. But seems 'twould be more neighborly-like to help to eat a slice of their Southdown mutton, seein' as they're so set on havin' you. An' that pretty young lady over there all by herself with never a bit of love-makin' from morn till night!"

But Harvey interposed with a gesture of annoyance.

"I wrote that I should be happy to accept," he announced, bending

down to replace a book he had brushed from the table.

When the last sound of his mother's footsteps—the clattering of loose, ill-fitting slippers upon the uncarpeted stairs, leading down to the rear of the building—had died away, Harvey turned and walked quickly from the room. An irresistible impulse drove him to escape the restraints of all confinement—to be out under the great, blue, silent heavens alone with his thoughts.

Friday! Did ever hours drag as slowly as would these! His brain reeled under the delirium of anticipation. This delightful, unlooked-for opportunity must have come through Her, through some desire on her part that they should meet again, and from the depths of his nature he was roused into a spirit of thankfulness to Her for it, a thankfulness in which there was

always that touch of poetic reverence which a man feels for the first woman who has taken strong hold upon his life.

He had thought to take the orchard path, and from thence to plunge deep into the woods; but as he turned the corner of the house he suddenly came upon Dorinda — Dorinda seated under a wide-spreading oak, enveloped in a long white apron and stemming strawberries with a will. Meaning to pass her by with merely a nod, a careless, kindly word, perhaps, all at once something altered his intention. He was in such an amiable, indulgent mood toward all the world, especially toward Dorinda, whose loveliness seemed to touch him at this moment with even more than ordinary charm. He felt his heart warm to her, as he stood watching the movements of the spirited little figure, appearing very quaint and child-

ish to-day in the long, white apron, reaching from just below the throat quite down to the slim ankles which peeped from beneath her pink calico gown. Moreover, it was a delight to look at her with that glow in her dusky cheek, and to watch the way the wind blew the soft tendrils of chestnut hair above the low brow and about her tiny ears.

She vouchsafed some slight acknowledgment of his presence, but did not pause from her work. Harvey threw himself on the grass at her feet.

"Are you in good humor to-day, Dorinda?" he inquired, teasingly, looking pensively up at her, and smiling from beneath his half-closed lids.

Dorinda's answer was brief and to the point.

"No," she replied flatly, "I am not," her antagonism instantly aroused by the levity of his manner.

He drew a little nearer to her, reaching out for one of the rounds of her chair, and thus dragging himself, along the grass, at her side. For a moment, with the utmost gravity, his eyes rested full and searchingly upon hers.

The girl flushed deeply, in one of those slow, burning blushes which once or twice before he had seen flash over her, dyeing her very throat, even where it could be seen beneath the surplice cut of her gown. In another instant she had turned angrily away.

"What a beautiful, savage little creature you are!" he cried involuntarily. Then noting the swift changes in her countenance, "you poor child! Poor little girl!" he said very gently, moved to a swift compassion.

"Do you know," he went on, stretching himself more comfortably on the grass at her feet, "the thought has

sometimes come to me of late that I do really hurt you with my silly jesting and nonsense? Surely, you don't think me the bear I seem? The truth is, Dorinda, I have been so little with women in my life, and know almost nothing of their ways and how to please them, I dare say I shall go on making no end of blunders with you all the time; but you know, you *do know*, what kindness there is in my heart for you, in spite of all?"

For once, indeed, he was speaking quite seriously. Unconsciously, he had fallen into a subdued, wounded tone, and he continued in the same strain:

"I can never quite rid myself of the feeling that you are finding me a nuisance and a bore, and all that kind of thing, and that I have no right to worry you."

For several moments after he had ceased speaking, Dorinda went steadily

on with her task, apparently feeling herself in no way called upon to offer a contradiction to the wholesome humility of his mood. Presently, however, she paused, and crossing one little slim hand above the other, rested them both upon the rim of the large earthen basin in her lap, critically examining them in a long, silent scrutiny. The sun had burned them to a warm brown, and they were shriveled about the finger tips and stained from contact with the fruit. Unsightly as they appeared to her, and never before had they seemed so unbeautiful she thought, she kept her eyes fixed upon them as if deriving some secret meaning or salutary discipline from their deliberate contemplation.

“You must not think that you worry me, Harvey,” she said, at length, lifting her eyes and meeting his glance quite calmly. Then, with a superb

gesture that seemed to thrill her small figure from head to foot, she added, loftily:

"It would not be possible for anyone to worry me in the least."

Harvey broke into a laugh.

"Then, my dear Lady Disdain, you are, indeed, fortunate. Lots of people have worried *me* in my life — no end of them, in fact."

"Have they?" she asked, dubiously, but with a growing interest, seeing that the conversation was likely to become a little less embarrassing.

"Oh, yes, indeed," he replied, solemnly; "I could never begin to tell you all that I have suffered in my day."

"But it must be so delightful to know people, and to go places and to see the world." she mused. She had moved sidewise in her chair, and, with one elbow on the back, was resting her chin in her hand. In her eyes there

was that far-away, wistful look that betrayed the restlessness of her existence and which always awoke in the young man a sympathetic regret for all that she was denied.

“Yes, it is delightful—the world; and how I should love to show it all to you. Do you know, Dorinda, I think you have the true artist’s nature—in the way of appreciation, I mean. I don’t believe there is anything you could not enjoy. See here—some day we shall go traveling together—”

He broke off abruptly—such a deathly pallor had overspread her face. At the same moment a bee brushed itself across her hand, and she uttered a low cry of pain.

He was at her side in an instant, holding the little quivering palm in his.

“Oh, did it sting you?” he cried; I am so sorry. But I can not find the

place," looking in vain for the slightest mark or swelling. She quickly snatched her hand away.

"No — no — it is nothing. It doesn't hurt me now. Really it does not," noting the still anxious look in his eyes.

"Are you quite sure that it does not?" he asked, still standing.

She had gathered up her bowl and was religiously stemming the fruit.

"They are such a nuisance, those horrid bees! It seems to me they follow me wherever I go," she complained, petulantly.

"I am sure I don't wonder," he answered, stretching himself again full length upon the ground, and comfortably placing his arms behind his head for a pillow; "I don't recall that any one ever compared me to that thrifty insect before, but I am myself at this moment conscious of at least one dis-

tinctive point of resemblance. However, I shall endeavor not to express my admiration quite so boldly as that last fellow."

He was lazily watching the white clouds floating peacefully overhead, and so failed to see the sudden tremor that swept over her tiny frame.

"But what was it we were speaking of a moment ago? Oh, yes, I remember now — about experience, and travel, and people, and things in general. By the way, I have been thinking a good deal lately about the loneliness of your life here, and trying to find a remedy. Is it really true that your days go on always like this without any companionship at all? Surely there must be some young girl in the neighborhood of your own age in whom you can take an interest?"

"I detest girls," Dorinda retorted, with a scornful curl of the lip.

Harvey indulged in a low whistle of dismay.

"Do you?" he inquired, much amused.

"Oh—I see," as if a sudden light had broken in upon him. "I will put the question differently: Isn't there some young *man*, then, in the neighborhood in whom you can take an interest? How about that young minister over at Walnut Hill that some one was speaking of last week?"

A surprised light gleamed from under the dark lashes for an instant—a light of hatred, almost, and defiance. She seemed struggling with herself in an effort for self-command. The beautiful, impassioned little face twitched nervously. Her form had grown rigid in its proud resentment. Then, all at once, her smothered anger resisting all control, she broke forth into the hot, reckless, hastily spoken words that seemed to rise unbidden to her lips:

“Why should you disturb yourself about my life?” she cried, savagely, from between her clenched teeth. “What is my life to you? And do I ever come to you with any complaint? What is it to you that I am lonely and uncared for and desolate? Is not the whole wide world still left for you? Can you not go and come when you will? What is my loneliness to *you*?”

Bitter, blinding tears had gathered in her eyes; her bosom, swept by a passion of revolt, rose and fell stormily beneath the folds of her gown. She had been carried completely out of herself, goaded on by his teasing words into a piteous avowal. But there was dignity in her stern isolation, a sensitiveness to a light approach which threw around her an impregnable reserve.

But when she had ceased speaking

a prolonged silence followed upon her outbreak.

If Harvey felt any surprise at the vehemence which he had unwittingly called down upon his own head, his manner in no way betrayed him. He did not once look toward her, however, but the nonchalant ease of his attitude remained unchanged. Presently he reached forth a hand and gathered a sprig of myrtle from the mass that grew around the old tree, gravely smoothing the polished leaves between his fingers, and still avoiding her eyes.

When, after a considerable time, he lifted his head, Dorinda was making ready to depart. But he was unprepared for the complete change in her—for the pathetic droop to the little figure, which a moment before had been so proudly defiant, the weariness, the listlessness that pervaded her expression and entire bearing. As she

met his glance a look of beseeching timidity, of sorrowful humiliation, stole into her eyes, which faltered and drooped beneath his quiet gaze like those of a child acknowledging a fault. He leaned forward and touched her on the arm.

"Dear," he said, very gently. "Oh, you poor, proud little thing!"

In that moment he felt there was no sacrifice he would not be willing to make to shield her from the suffering which, from the very nature of her temperament, she was inevitably destined to call down upon herself.

"Why can't we be friends, Dorinda?" he insisted, drawing a little nearer to her and endeavoring to throw into his voice some of the earnestness he felt more deeply than he had any words to express, being accustomed, as he was when with her, to easily fall into the old playful tone she had always

seemed irresistibly to provoke. "Why need we keep up this state of things? Do you think I am really such a block-head as not to understand everything that you may have to endure? The dreariness of your life here — why, you just can't think how often the thought of it has come to me and troubled me. You aren't like any other girl — you feel too much, and you dream, which always means to suffer. It's all on account of possessing too lively an imagination, I suppose. But things aren't half as bad as they look — they never are; and, if you will pardon my vanity in the assumption, I do think I might brighten you up a bit, if you would only give me the chance."

Dorinda looked at that moment as if in truth she were not without the need of a certain process of brightening up, as her brow had not yet cleared in spite

of the allurements he chose to offer. But he went on confidently, manifesting such a kind and brotherly enthusiasm regarding her amusement, that she was forced to give him her attention.

"What do you say now," he suggested, "of a plan like this — I thought of it a moment ago while we were speaking: There's going to be a pretty good company, (not first-class, of course, at this time of the year, but still fairly good) at the opera house in Lexington to-morrow evening and the next. What do you say? We might drive in in time for the opera, and then come home by moonlight; these nights are perfect. What do you think of the idea, Dorinda? Now do be a good child and say you will go with me."

He had been watching her face as he spoke, the pretty, mobile, swiftly flushing cheek, and there was little cause for the uncertainty, which, as a matter

of precaution, he threw into his voice as he urged his request.

The girl drew a long, deep breath before she answered. If only the picture he held out to her were not so enchanting! The opera! In all her life she had never been to an opera. To hear it with him, and then the drive home by moonlight under the thick trees! If only the picture were not so perfect, so beautiful, perhaps even yet she might have the strength to tell him no.

But Harvey's face was still upturned to hers with that look of flattering entreaty she had always found so difficult to resist. He did really seem to want her. Why should she not go?

"Oh, Harvey!" she cried, at length, and could say no more. But there was no mistaking the delight which glowed from her face. To the young man who had heard everything from Wagner to

the lightest music of the day, there was something touching as well as charming in her excitement at the prospect of this very mild form of enjoyment which was the best he could offer. He had privately anticipated that the opera, as far as he was personally concerned, would be something barely endurable; but he now found himself looking forward with considerable zest to the pleasure of witnessing her happiness.

He had risen and was standing leaning against the tree at her side, looking meditatively down upon her.

"You really will go with me?" he said, at length. "It is so good of you. Then to-morrow," with an airy wave of the hand—"and by your gracious pleasure."

But a shadow had suddenly crept into Dorinda's eyes—a half-startled look as of fear that her joy might be snatched away from her.

"Would it suit you quite as well, Harvey," she asked, timidly, "if — if we did not go until the evening after, until Friday—would it suit you quite as well?"

Harvey's face expressed a slight annoyance.

"But why not to-morrow?" he inquired, coldly. "Because I am afraid I can not go to-morrow," she replied, very sadly, still with that unusual shrinking in her manner, a dread of offending him. "I had forgotten when you spoke; I shall be needed here."

"How perfectly absurd, Dorinda," he cut in hotly, now genuinely provoked. "But, of course, if you don't care to go with me —"

"Oh, I care — I *do* care — but," she suddenly paused, unable to go on. Tears had gathered in her eyes, tears of disappointment and regret; she looked quickly away.

"But what then? Why don't you say you will go at once, Dorinda? Can't you see that I do really mean it, that I want you, and that you annoy me by this unnecessary hesitation in such a little matter? Tell me now, finally, do you want to go, or do you not?"

"I want to go," she said, slowly, looking down at the ground. "That is—"

"Then we will consider it an engagement," he announced, firmly, "for to-morrow evening."

"I can not go before Friday," she repeated, sorrowfully shaking her head. "The fruit is all over-ripe. I shall be needed here. We shall be preserving all day to-morrow, and perhaps quite late into the night. But I thought, perhaps," she hesitated and flushed a little as she hurried on, "I thought, if you understood, that — if Friday would suit you just as well—"

"In other words, you mean that you do not care to go with me. Oh, very well, I won't bother you," he responded, in his careless, off-hand fashion. "Perhaps it really would not have been so entertaining after all. I only thought to give you a pleasure. As you evidently prefer the more delightful occupation of making strawberry preserves to such frivolities, I can only accept my fate. Well — I think I've bored you long enough for one morning."

She caught in her breath with a pained start, seeing that he was about to leave her.

"Why won't you understand?" she cried, helplessly. "I do thank you for thinking of me, and I want to go with you — oh, Harvey! if you would only say that Friday would suit you just as well."

"But it will not," he answered, shortly. "You know perfectly well that you

could go with me Thursday, if you wished, and all this is only an evasion, an excuse. Nevertheless, I would take you at your word and say Friday, since you name it, if I had not an engagement for that evening, which will make it impossible."

He spoke with a certain formality, an embarrassment of manner which he was unable to conceal.

An engagement! She knew not from what cause came the sudden, ice-cold grasp at her heart that left her powerless to speak. But a dark foreboding of evil, as yet only dimly defined, set all her pulses throbbing as if some hideous phantom had swiftly glided before her sight.

She did not try to look up; she could not. She could only wait until he spoke.

"I am asked to dine at Grassland on Friday evening; otherwise, Friday

would suit me as well as any other time."

The words, simple, common-place as they were, yet spoken with an undisguised constraint, shot through her with the force of no other utterance that had ever yet fallen on her ears.

And all at once the glory faded out of the summer skies; the wind in the low branches was a moan, and, oh, that leaden, sickening feeling at her heart! A blue-bird called from the maple as of old. But to-day there was something taunting in the sound. She gave a startled glance over her shoulder; there was something to hurt her in every object on which her glances fell.

Harvey, noting the pain in her eyes, and misinterpreting the cause, experienced a reaction of feeling toward her and magnanimously forgave her her refusal to comply with his wishes.

After all, it would seem that she had not acted from a mere caprice, as she so frequently did.

“Really, I’m awfully sorry about it, Dorinda,” he began, his amiability finally restored, “but some fine day, we’ll have another lark together. We shall have no end of good times now that I am beginning to feel that your intentions are not as unflattering as you sometimes make them appear, and that you do not really mean to avoid me. But about Friday,” halting, and speaking with the reluctance which from the first he had manifested on the mention of the day — “of course you understand now why I insisted that you should go with me on Thursday evening instead?”

And Dorinda, turning her white, drawn little face away, answered that she understood.

X.

Old Grassland was ablaze with hospitable cheer.

From afar, in glimpses through the thick trees, and from time to time revealed by the tortuous pathway through the woods, Harvey could see the many lights of the building burning into the night.

As if the myriad voices of the darkness had throbbed themselves into one passionate note of pleading, now and again a melancholy monotone rose and fell with rhythmical precision on the quivering breeze. As he approached the house, the sob-like repetition took on a more varied form of entreaty, and the sound of harps on some distant veranda, tuneful and delicious, floated plaintively out to the quiet stars.

Near the doorway the air was heavy with the breath of flowers. The broad portal, its quaint semicircular frame aglow, was flung generously wide. All the windows being open, the stately appointments of the old house were visible from the outside.

The long drawing-room with its yellow satin hangings, its polished floors, and high carved mantels, was lighted with wax candles which shone from innumerable sconces and candelabra, and reflected brilliantly in the many mirrors. There was that old-time picturesqueness over everything which is only attained by the mellowing touch of years. In the spirit of veneration for his ancestors inherent with the Kentuckian, the walls of the room, to the exclusion of all other adornment of art, presented a redoubtable array of family portraits, which, with indiscriminate severity, stared down upon the

just and the unjust from their heavy guilt confines. These cherished possessions were in many cases the work of artists whose names have become not only inseparable from the history of the State, but of national renown. Here and there were rare bits of china, and on all sides tall vases and bowls filled with flowers.

Upon the divans and high-back chairs, the guests, (all of whom had apparently assembled,) were seated— young women and men in evening toilet, indulging in the familiar discourse of people well-acquainted with each other. The hum of their voices and their light laughter were borne to Harvey Greer as he came quickly up the steps. But their good-humored levity jarred painfully upon him.

At the thought of this next meeting, he had felt himself stirred with all the devout emotions of one entering some

consecrated fane. He was conscious of the painful sensation of listening to unseemly clamor in a sacred place, as his glance, drawn by an irresistible attraction, fell upon a gay group at the further end of the room.

He could not tell why in that sharp flash of recognition he developed, instantly, a spirit of antagonism against those thoroughly well-mannered young gentlemen surrounding the beautiful golden-haired woman, who was half-reclining among silken pillows, waving a fan of white ostrich tips to and fro, and letting her eyes, lit with a mysterious fire, slowly wander from one to another in attentive silence.

Perhaps he resented their ease in her presence; perhaps it struck him that their homage was a trifle too pronounced; perhaps he felt irritated that she should allow it to be so; perhaps—but who can analyze the morbid com-

plexity of feeling which possesses a man at such a moment? His nature may be of the broadest, but no man is a philosopher either with the toothache or when in love.

In another moment, outwardly calm, deliberate, entirely free from the self-distrust which renders one awkward or embarrassed, he had entered the room and was bowing low before his hostess, who came fluttering toward him, smiling and very gracious.

She looked charming in her gown of old-rose silk, her plump shoulders rising daintily above the low bodice. The consciousness of being becomingly dressed, which with a woman is supposed to impart a satisfaction beyond the consolations of religion, was delightfully hers. She laughed a good deal, sometimes a trifle irrelevantly, Harvey thought, as she stood chatting with him in amiable volubil-

ity, revealing her white, beautiful teeth.

But under her affable speech and manner there was all the while a covert observation. She reflected that, after all, she had not blundered in inviting Harvey Greer to her house. The poetic face of the young man, his pallor somewhat intensified under the candle-light, seemed to hold even a greater attraction now that she saw him in his faultless evening attire and witnessed his perfect composure of bearing. There was no doubt that Margaret would find him quite diverting. Moreover, he seemed a perfect gentleman — why should not one invite him? And then, too, he was tall — such little men were always flocking around Margaret. Really, her conscience was quite at rest, for, of course, nothing serious could ever come of it, and now the summer would be so much less dull.

There had come a slight pause in the conversation. For the first time Harvey allowed his eyes to wander in the direction of the group at the end of the room. Margaret's fan was still waving languidly to and fro. His heart gave a great leap as he looked at her. For an instant he could not speak.

Mrs. Pryor, following the direction of his glance, chimed in suavely:

"I am going to ask you to take my niece in to dinner, Mr. Greer. I mean Miss Pryor, of course, you understand; but it always seems so ridiculous that Margaret should have become my niece, such a very little difference as there is in our ages; and then, too, before my marriage we had been always quite good friends. The idea is absurd."

"Very absurd," Harvey agreed, with polite emphasis, his smile conveying

the flattery which so easily won for him his way into the good favor of all women.

“And yet we have had such very different lives. Margaret has never known what it is to have a care, while I—” and she threw out her hands with an expressive gesture of resignation and a shrug of her dimpled shoulders.

“But it is somewhat difficult to think of you as a person oppressed,” the young man suggested, a twinkle of amusement playing around the corners of his mouth.

“General Pryor says I like nothing so well as to represent myself in the light of a martyr. The truth is, if I am given to magnifying my responsibilities, he always belittles them; and I suppose the explanation for everything may be found in the fact that the duties of a sylvan existence are as irksome to me as they are delight-

ful to him." The laugh that followed wholly belied the bitterness that her words might have implied. She broke off abruptly; the General had suddenly caught sight of his young friend, and, with hands outstretched in welcome, was bearing ponderously down upon them.

"Remember that you are to take in Miss Pryor," she said, as she turned away, with her confiding smile.

"I am pleased to see you; pleased to see you, sir!" the General exclaimed, heartily, as he came up, giving Harvey a cordial grasp of the hand. "In fact, this is a pleasure which I have been anticipating for a long time," he added in his pompous but kindly fashion.

Harvey bowed his thanks and appreciation.

"Social occasions of the character of the present one are always delightful, very delightful," General Pryor con-

tinued with slow impressiveness, leaning his portly frame against the side of the doorway, and with hospitable intent endeavoring to place the young man entirely at his ease. "It is not so much the enjoyment of the moment that is of value, though that, of course, is not without its importance; but it is the agreeable and fraternal state of mind brought about by the recollection of such experiences that renders them the more worthy of our appreciation. '*Haec olim meminisse juvabit*,' you understand. The truth of that saying often forces itself upon the attention. Let me give you an illustration: Several weeks ago, while off with a party of friends on a fishing excursion in the mountains —"

And thereupon there followed a pointless, egotistical anecdote of considerable length, interspersed with various emphatic gesticulations and

sundry violent spasmodic grasps upon the listener's arm which well-nigh wheeled him off his feet. If, like the wedding guest, Harvey felt inclined to exclaim, "Unhand me, grey-beard loon!" he very wisely stifled the impulse, and forcing his features into an expression of interest, he resigned himself with the best of grace to any amount of personal torture that his eccentric admirer might see fit to inflict. However, virtue met with its reward shortly afterward, and dinner was announced. The General, charmed on finding young Greer (who in reality had scarcely spoken as much as a single sentence) so entertaining, moved away with reluctance to offer his arm to one of the matrons. The other guests filed slowly in. The group at the end of the room had dispersed.

Margaret Pryor was standing alone, leaning a little wearily against the

yellow satin portière at the wide archway which divided the two long rooms.

Harvey's heart beat tumultuously as he came toward her. Then, as his devouring glance slowly realized the subtle flattery of her apparel, a flush of triumphant joy mounted hotly to his temples ; for her gown, white, ethereal, clinging foam-like about her perfect neck and arms, was, in every detail of its simplicity, precisely such as she had worn when he beheld her for the first time in all her radiant loveliness that evening in New York so many years before. Even the arrangement of her hair was the same ; rippling away from her low forehead and forming a strange contrast with the jetty brows and lashes beneath, it was gathered into a Greek knot at the back and bound about with a slender, gleaming cord which here and there lost itself in the shining

meshes, just as his thoughts of her were wont to entangle themselves in golden dreams and fancies.

She was looking down at the ground, abstracted, motionless, and serene. As she thus stood, she seemed an example in exaggeration of the old adage that every woman is a sphinx who sets a man a riddle to read. There was even something elfish in the effect of the incongruity of the small head, set high on its white column, against the superb development of her imperial proportions.

She let him come quite near to her before she lifted her face; but all the while, under her apparently unstudied absorption, her attitude was that of one who waits. A moment afterward, with a smile, dazzling, enthralling—that bewildered and bewildering recognition which the sleeping beauty may have accorded the fairy prince who came to

wake her from her long trance—she slowly opened her eyes to his.

“Am I to be your fate, Mr. Greer?” she said. She made a gesture in the direction of the room beyond toward which all were repairing, the drawing-room being now well-nigh deserted.

He grew a shade paler as he stood looking down upon her. There was in his manner the calm, the severity of a powerful self-repression. He drew short, uneven breaths, and in his eyes there was a strange brilliancy.

“Am I to be your fate?” she repeated, with a half-mocking inclination of the head.

“Yes,” he answered, gravely, his slow searching gaze diving deep into hers and holding it irresistibly for a moment. Then, in a bold impulse, the words breaking through all restraint, he added, fiercely, under his breath, “not

only now, but hereafter, and always; surely you know it!"

That same feeling which he had experienced in their former meeting: the realization of the utter weakness, the futility even, of all spoken language between them made it impossible for him to adopt any form of conventionality with her. A mysterious glamor was beginning to steal over his senses. He found it difficult to think clearly or to speak. Like some lustrous vision from the shadow land of dreams, a being whom in some far off, dim existence he had once known and loved, she seemed to him, as with downcast eyes and indolent grace, she stood leaning against the tall pillar at his side. Her voice, though it fell upon his ears like the sound of a divine and distant harmony, seemed to him not really expressive of the emotion which he could not but believe she felt, but to contain in it

a note of chilliness, just as her brilliant, bodily presence could only half reveal the hidden pearl of her soul's great, matchless beauty.

Presently she turned and let her eyes rest fully upon him, deliberately, meditatively. Her expression betrayed neither hauteur nor a failure to comprehend. But her look seemed to pierce him through and through, to lay bare the furthestmost recesses of his nature as a bold lightning flash discloses in one brilliant revelation all that a moment before was veiled in darkness impenetrable.

In another instant her low, tantalizing laughter, rippling, perfectly controlled, yet not wholly sweet, disclaimed the seriousness of his mood. She laid her hand lightly on his arm and moved with a careless jest through the open doorway to the room beyond, where the long table, bristling with cut glass,

shone royally in the soft light yielded from old silver candelabra under their pink, silken shades, and sent forth sweet incense from deep bowls of June roses wafting their perfume before the altar of youth, and hope, and joy.

It was an altogether goodly company there assembled, the seating of the guests being governed by that thoughtful regard for their congeniality which is so essential to the success of a dinner.

There were several celebrities present — those most important adjuncts to our modern entertainments — a poet, an artist, and also a young author whose exquisite purity of thought and diction had won for him a world-wide appreciation, and added another name to that long list of illustrious ones which are the State's proud heritage. The women, without an exception, were pretty, vivacious, and responsive. The

classic perfection of Margaret Pryor stood out in unusual contrast to their irregular beauty. It is rare in Kentucky that one looks upon a perfect outline, but rarer still to find an unlovely countenance among the women of any grade.

For several moments after they were seated Margaret maintained the courteous formality she might have accorded to any stranger presented to her for the first time. Not a word, not a glance betrayed the smallest recognition of a former meeting. Gradually the pained look in the young man's eyes had given place to an expression of rigid determination—a stubborn refusal to adopt her tone in his replies; but he proudly accepted the drift into which she forced the conversation.

The third course was being served. A rising young Demosthenes, with the

Kentuckian's inborn proclivity for anecdotal illustration, had just concluded a lively reminiscence, very graphically and humorously told. Laughter and spirited repartee floated around; subdued strains of music stole in from the veranda; the air was languorous with the fragrance of the flowers on the table and of those outside near the windows. When the curtains parted, from time to time, in the light breeze, the tropical perfume of lilies seemed to thrill the senses like an old memory fanned into sudden flame. Harvey Greer had grown silent. Every nerve, every fibre of his being seemed vibrating to some overmastering influence.

Margaret bent her head toward him. A lovely smile played about her features. She gave a brief, comprehensive glance down the table, and then lowered her voice quite suddenly.

"Do you not appreciate the flattery, Mr. Greer?" she inquired. "To-night I preferred you to all others. So few of our actions are deliberate. Impulse or accident seems usually the governing principle. The premeditated choice of a companion in a long drawn-out symposium undeniably involves a compliment. There are six other men present, any one of whom I might have selected; but I chose you."

"Will you tell me why?" he asked, abruptly. In the tense tones of his voice there was something stern and compelling.

"Because you interest me," she replied at once.

"Do not the others interest you too?"

"No."

She toyed a moment with one of the roses near her plate.

"Do you want to go further and

demand an analysis?" she asked, at length.

"A man does not analyze when his happiness is complete."

"That is because he fears it will not bear the test."

"It is because he prefers to take unquestioningly the good the gods bestow."

"No one ever takes anything unquestioningly in the age in which we live. It is the very pathos of the cruel jest of our existence here that we should be doomed to a continual reaching out of hands for the shining bubble that always melts in our grasp. It is wiser to behold it from afar. When I was a little girl I broke up every intricate toy I ever possessed to see what was inside it. To-day I find myself inquiring into the meaning of things with just such unsatisfactory results."

"Did you try to find a meaning for

the liking which you are good enough to imply you feel for me?" he demanded, too happy, as he had said, to speak with any attempt at seriousness.

"She looked at him again, quite steadily.

"Yes," she answered, with a slight reluctance, "I did."

"And what was the conclusion that you came to?"

"I am half afraid to tell you, for fear you may not altogether understand."

"Don't hesitate about that; my mind is accustomed to grappling with such abstruse and portentous subjects; and even if I can not comprehend all, at least I shall be grateful for whatever modicum my bewildered intelligence can attain to."

She laughed a little in a half-embarrassed fashion.

"It would seem such a strange, un-womanly sort of thing to say."

"It may possibly be strange, but it will not be unwomanly," he responded quickly, still studying her face and drinking in her beauty in a kind of slow absorption, as if the process were deliberately prolonged.

"I like you for three things," she began, slowly. "In the first place, you interest me because of your enthusiasms. We are, probably, of about the same age, and yet it is difficult for me to believe that I have ever felt, that I ever could feel, as strongly as I know intuitively that you must in regard to so many things. I have always the unsatisfactory realization that my powers of emotion have been exhausted, not through feeling too much, but from disuse. I confess to a certain curiosity as to how I should meet the supreme test, if ever I should be brought face to face with it. Then—I like you for your sincerity. You

seem always to be so deeply in earnest," she added, coloring faintly, a pink flush overspreading her white face like the glow from a sunset cloud on the features of a statue.

"Well, I am in earnest," the young man answered, without the slightest hesitation.

"But what is the other reason—the strange, unwomanly reason that you are keeping from me?"

"I don't quite think I can tell you that," she objected.

"Yes, I think you will tell me," he insisted quietly, and then waited for her to go on, very patiently.

She did not answer for a time, but she smiled a little, in a puzzling sort of way, at his dictatorial tone, which was the only acknowledgment she gave it. Apparently that also interested her as something novel and refreshing. She gathered up one of the pink rose-

buds at her plate and began to ruthlessly strip off the petals.

"*Tell* me," he pleaded, but always with the same confident ring in his voice, never doubting that he would gain his point at last.

"Really, I can not," she replied, softly, suddenly lowering her eyelids.

Several seconds passed. She was looking down at the flower in her hand. The strains of music outside grew louder, the hubbub of voices increased. No one was taking the smallest notice of them. It was as if they were quite alone, and so he did not forbear to let his eyes rest continually upon her with the burning looks her loveliness provoked.

"But you must tell me," he whispered, scarcely realizing what he said, feeling his brain whirl under the intoxication of the spell which every moment she was weaving more tightly around him.

"Once upon a time," she began, and her words had a dreamy, far-away sound, blending weirdly with the music, "once upon a time, before going into a certain battle, Alexander went to the priestess that presided at the oracle of Delphi and demanded that she should go with him to obtain an augury; but the priestess refused to go, saying that the day was not propitious. Alexander insisted, but she as steadfastly refused. Finally, wearied with her obstinacy, he took her roughly by the arm and declared that she should go with him; whereupon the priestess, seeing his unconquerable will, exclaimed in prophetic tones: 'My son, thou art irresistible!' And Alexander, satisfied, went his way."

The last petal fell from her rose; her lips parted in a slow, inscrutable smile; her long lashes swept her cheek.

A gleam, like a flash from a rapier,

leaped from his eyes to hers. He bent his head toward her. Her fan dropped from her lap to the floor, and as he leaned down to restore it to her, his hand brushed lightly against her fingers. He drew back, breathing heavily—and the glittering board reeled before him, like the fantastic vision of a dream!

At the same moment, above the pleading harps and the mirth and laughter, there was a low, sob-like wail just outside the window, and he quickly turned his head with an impatient movement, as if annoyed that for one instant, even, he must take his eyes away from the beautiful, alluring woman at his side. But no one else had seemed to heed it, and the sound was not repeated; for like some wounded, hunted creature of the woods, the little figure from whose breast it had been wrung was speeding onward through

the dark glades of the forest impelled by only one piercing thought: to shut out from her sight a scene which an irresistible impulse had driven her to witness, and from which, in the assurance thus received, she had suffered a stab too mortal and deep for any earthly cure.

XI.

ALL day a July sun had scorched the earth with scarce a tremor among the leaves. But toward five o'clock, when the shadows deepen and the lazy cattle begin to stir, a gentle whispering woke the trees, breathing a message of hope to the thirsting forests.

George Anderson, faithful representative of the Church Militant — the young Presbyterian divine of Walnut Hill, in the County of Fayette — was spending this first hour after the heat's abatement among the flowers of his garden, rooting out the rank growth from about the tender plants, just as he patiently strove, but alas, with often far less encouraging result, to destroy the weeds of worldliness and impiety continually cropping up in the hearts

of his flock. He was a frail, earnest-looking young man of about thirty years of age, of medium height, with sandy-colored hair and moustache, and brilliant, deep-set eyes burning ceaselessly under his high brow with that look of tireless inquiry after Truth which one always pictures upon the faces of the early followers of Christ. For, in truth, the command that had come to his spirit, rousing him like the blast of a clarion out of the lethargic indifference of his former years, had contained for him all the sublime conviction of that immediate revelation received by those believing ones more than eighteen hundred years ago. There were times when his countenance, otherwise without comeliness, shone as with an almost heavenly transfiguration; when little children crept closer about him, and the tempted and the aged and the broken-hearted

derived new strength as they looked upon him.

A Virginian by birth, one of a large and impoverished family, he was absolutely without prospects save for that glorious heritage reserved for God's elect. But his talents were such as might have enabled him to fill with honor a wider sphere of action than that afforded by the quiet rural district in which his lot seemed to be cast.

For years, and with never an ambitious thought for self, he had labored among the little flock gathered weekly in the old stone church on the hillside, gratefully receiving the meagre salary that was doled out to him—at times grudgingly enough—throwing his whole soul into his work, and striving to acquaint himself with the lives of the people about him, their sorrows, their joys, their simple hopes and interests, so as to be truly both friend

and teacher in all their temporal as well as spiritual conditions.

But of this number there was one who, above all others, filled him with anxiety and awoke the most sensitive chords of his nature.

All day she had been in his thoughts. And how his heart leaped at her very name! With what unspeakable solicitude it yearned for her at dread of the world's rough ways — the vivid, impulsive, wholly fascinating little creature that had flashed across his path in the first dawning of his manhood, dazzling him with her charm and almost blinding him to her imperfections. She was scarcely more than a child in those days, he recalled, as he stood a moment leaning on his hoe, shading his eyes with his hand from the sunlight, and looking longingly down the slope leading toward the narrow lane that skirted the premises to the left. He had always

called her by her name, it pleased him to remember—such a very pretty name as it was! Dorinda! How lingeringly one always pronounced it, as if loth to let it pass the lips!

But, like a flower that springs into blossom in a single night, she had seemed to him to suddenly undergo the marvellous transformation of the young girl into the mysterious state of womanhood with all its inexplicable variations that lie beyond. And so, in view of this, a new and constant perplexity had been disturbing him of late. For some time past, there had been certain things in her conduct he was at a loss to comprehend. For weeks she had not been to church. That beautiful, divine love which he strove so strenuously to reveal to her, and which shed so holy a radiance on his own existence, had been cast aside as a worthless thing. How was he to make her understand it?

With such natures as hers, he felt convinced that the love of God, in all its matchless strength and glory, is only awakened through the undying devotion that sometimes springs up in the poor human heart for one of His weak and erring creatures; just as with others the moral sense is never fully aroused until that awful moment when the soul is shaken to its utmost depths by a profound recognition and repentance of some especially heinous sin.

Presently he laid aside his implement and began to pace uneasily up and down the garden path, his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed in meditation. It had been ten days or more since he last saw her, and as his mind dwelt upon her flushed cheek and the feverish brilliancy of her eyes, which at the time had only vaguely disturbed him, a painful foreboding suddenly took hold of him, thus, for a

moment, his spiritual fears in regard to her being instinctively supplanted by a natural apprehension for her physical well-being. If she should be ill, if she should have to suffer — poor little shorn lamb — how earnestly he besought that the wind might be tempered to her!

But as he pondered thus, his great soul seeming to hover protectingly over her in the supreme tenderness of his nature, all at once another and even more blinding alarm stabbed him to the very heart's center, the thought slowly evolving itself out of the intricate workings of his troubled brain into a definite form — the form of Harvey Greer!

In another moment he had bowed his head in his hands as there sprung to his lips a prayer of such deep and terrible contrition that the dark veins about his temples seemed like heavy, animated cords burrowing beneath the flesh.

“ Father, forgive me, I know not what I do! Is it not for this, for this, O God, that I have waited and trusted and prayed—that the knowledge of Thy love more precious than any earthly thing, should, in Thine own time and at Thine own election be thus revealed to her through the love of one of Thy chosen creatures? ”

For nearly an hour he walked there, wrestling in one of those fierce conflicts with self, out of which there sometimes comes either the darkest tragedy of the soul or the man's complete apotheosis. When he finally raised his head, pale, exhausted, yet triumphant, his face was as the face of one to whom angels had appeared, comforting him. Involuntarily, his first glance turned toward that outward symbol of the Christian faith, the old stone church grayly outlined on the brow of the hill. The dense walnut trees, sighing above the sunken

graves in the ancient churchyard, seemed to waft him a thought of peace, as there stole into his mind the well-known lines of Goethe :

“ On every mountain-height
Is rest.
O'er each summit white
Thou feelest
Scarcely a breath.
Only wait, soon shalt thou
Rest too in death.”

A moment afterward, with a characteristic resistance of any morbid emotion, he was vigorously applying himself to his present duty, to the exclusion of all contemplation of the final rest, the neglected flower-beds soon showing the effect of his energies. And so, thus engaged, he failed to see the little figure moving steadily toward him down the scented lane, her pink gown fluttering in and out among the trees, like a rose tossed by the wind. In truth, she had entered the wicket

gate at the side and was standing quite at his elbow before he was in any way conscious of her presence. On her arm she carried a basket, above whose contents a snowy napkin had been neatly tucked.

Her bronze hair, swirling about her low brow at the wind's soft dalliance, glinted and gleamed beneath the brim of her simple straw hat. There were quivering, changeful shafts in her great, luminous, warm eyes. Her lips were half parted in an intercepted smile, the visible manifestation of a sudden whim, her expression being that of a disappointed child who had planned a surprise and been discovered just before the moment of climax.

When the young minister, hearing a stealthy footfall on the garden path at his right, turned and saw her standing before him, as if conjured up by the mere power of his own thoughts,

for an instant he remained speechless. Then the hoe fell from his hand, and a startled expletive escaped him as he raised himself, his face growing strangely white.

She broke into a merry peal of laughter at his expense, the old sweet, ringing laughter—yet with a difference; for, as the last sound died away, a note of sadness lingered, like the echo to a chime of bells.

She moved a little nearer under the shadow of the cool, green arbor.

“Did I frighten you?” she asked, in her pretty, audacious fashion. “I meant to,” shamelessly acknowledging her nefarious intent. In another second, the weight of the basket on her arm reminding her of the object of her visit, with all the air of an empress bestowing some mark of her favor on the humblest of her servitors, she extended the offering.

"Take this to your mother," she directed, loftily. "Yesterday was baking day, and I made those ginger cakes for her. There are two or three jars of currant jelly."

"That was most kind and thoughtful of you, Dorinda," the young man exclaimed, heartily, as he relieved her of her burden; "and my mother will be much disappointed that she was not here to receive you. This is the first day in months that she has been off the place; but early this morning she drove into town, and I do not expect her back until nearly nightfall. These pilgrimages are serious affairs, you know," he concluded, smiling pleasantly, too honest, however, to express a regret on his own part for the fortuitous circumstance that had devolved the amenities of a welcome solely upon himself.

"Yes," she admitted, mechanically,

"the drive is very long." She had taken the seat he offered, the rustic bench near the trellis over which a grape-vine clustered luxuriantly, and taking off her hat, leaned her head a little wearily against one of the slender posts. Then it was that he was conscious for the first time of the great change in her that the past few weeks had wrought. Her spasmodic gayety of a moment before only seemed to enhance the look of suffering deeply lined on the delicate features. She was pale, paler than he had ever seen her, he noted, her swart, smooth cheek being overspread with a grayish tone in marked contrast to her customary bloom. But not only had the brilliant cherry color completely disappeared, but there were dark, ominous lines under the amber eyes that bespoke sleepless nights and dire, suppressed emotion. Her little hands — and never

had they seemed so frail to him, so slenderly beautiful—lay very quietly in her lap with seldom a relapse into the old impatient, nervous movement.

He sat looking at her in silence, profoundly touched, yet unwilling to appear to notice the piteous change.

“Such a long time as I have been trying to get here,” she said at length, pushing her hair back from her brow with a tired gesture, and rousing herself as with an effort, “Do you think your mother will like the cakes?” she inquired eagerly, turning a wistful face toward him.

The minister’s eyes brightened a little at the question.

“I am quite sure she will,” he answered, gravely.

“Is she better—do you think she will soon be well?” she asked, then suddenly paused, seeing the look of pain that shot across his face—that

swift, sharp contraction of the muscles about the mouth by which the sensitive nature is betrayed.

"No, Dorinda," he replied, sadly, after a moment, "I think it may be a long, long time before she is well again, if ever in this world. But we must do all we can for her this winter, and try to save up a little money, so that we can get her down to Florida in another year; there's no telling what the mild climate might do for her," he concluded, an enforced cheerfulness animating his speech. And then, the beautiful unselfishness of his nature asserting itself, unwilling that his own private sorrow should cast even a momentary shadow upon her, he strove to direct her thoughts into another channel.

"Will you not come into the parlor?" he presently suggested, somewhat overwhelmed in his unfamiliar experience

as host. Hospitably eager to bestow some special courtesy upon her, he was yet completely at sea as to the form of entertainment it would be best to offer.

“Will you not come into the parlor, and let Aunt Lucindy make you a — a well, a mince pie, for instance — how would you like that?” he beamingly proposed, half rising from his seat, as if already assured of her acquiescence.

Dorinda regarded him quite steadily for a long time, a look of such drollery depicted on her countenance that it almost seemed as if all her old vivacity had returned ; and the young minister, conscious of having blundered in some blind fashion, but still not knowing precisely in what way, nevertheless felt as if he had hit upon a lucky device to restore her drooping spirits.

She gave him finally an amused, sidelong glance, accompanied by a be-

witching little backward dip of the head, and lowered her eyes demurely.

"I believe I will not take any mince pie to-day, thank you," she announced decidedly, "and I very much prefer to stay here," calmly remaining seated.

But suddenly becoming contrite at the sight of his crestfallen, disappointed aspect, with ready tact she sprang up with a cry of delight.

"Oh, those lovely sweet peas over there by the garden-wall! Will you give me some of them? I should so much like to have a few."

He rushed off to despoil his vines, only too delighted to discover that anything of his had found favor in her eyes. He came back in a short while, his hands filled with the delicious pink and white and purplish blooms which he had awkwardly made into a taut, variegated nosegay of titanic bulk.

But even in that little time, he

observed that her former listlessness had returned, and that she had again wandered off into that far-away dream-land of the soul in which he needed naught beyond the intuitive conviction of his own heart to assure him that he bore no part. What could she be thinking of in those lonely flights, he wondered, her eyes turned so wistfully toward the golden glory of the distant western hills.

“I am so tired — I think I should like to go away,” she declared at length, breaking the long silence with a movement half petulant, half despairing. She let her arms fall heavily to her side, then raised them in sudden impatience. There was a tremulous vibration in the sweet young voice. The damp tendrils of hair clinging about her neck and temples increased her child-like appearance, and in some way added a woeful touch.

But he seemed neither to heed nor to hear. For several moments he had not dared to trust himself to look at her. A mighty surging was in his ears. The habitual self-control of his strong nature, shaken by the unexpected happiness of her presence, was beginning to waver. To see her sitting there by his side among the flowers just as if she had not meant to leave at all; to hear the birds singing in the branches above them, and the drowsy tinkle of the sheep bells in the distance; to share this and all the other sweet country sights and sounds with her, not only now, but always and always — what wonder the thought came to him, and that he turned away his eyes?

“I think I should like to go away — away — away,” she repeated, drearily, “I am so *very* tired.”

This time something caught his ear. He looked up quickly. Could this be

anything more than the natural restlessness of youth under the restraints of a too monotonous existence? The possibility that any man could know her and yet be indifferent to all her warm, bright loveliness could not occur to him as a plausible basis of conjecture. And yet, her words, though they left a sting, in some vague way seemed to lift a stifling burden from his breast. He turned to her with a gleam in his eyes.

“If you should go away, Dorinda,” he said, earnestly, “there are some who would be very lonely and sad, and there are others,” here he hesitated an instant before he went on more gravely, “there are others to whom life could never be the same again.” And then quickly reverting to the old simple friendliness, he added at once, but with a slight embarrassment:

“I was beginning to fear that you might be ill; it has been so long since I

have seen you. That is why the sight of you startled me, I had been thinking of you all the afternoon. I wanted to ask your cousin about you one day last week when I passed him on the road, but he was not alone, he was with Miss Pryor, and I saw him for only a moment."

A flush painful in its intensity swept to her brow, but before he could notice she had buried her face in the flowers. It was several seconds before she could control her voice sufficiently to answer him, but when she lifted her head there was a cold defiance in her manner, a passionate reproach in her reply for which he was wholly unprepared, and which was, in fact, only a bitter, indefinite cry of pain wrung from her tortured heart.

"You are finding fault with me because I do not go to church," she exclaimed resentfully, her quivering face

becoming all at once hard and set. "Well, I'm never going to church any more; it is just as well that you should know it once for all. I do not love the God you preach about—do you hear? I do not love him any more."

The young minister drew back as if stung by a blinding flame, her childish revolt containing for him a far deeper and more serious meaning than the rebellious irreverence of her reckless words. For a long time he was silent. He leaned one elbow on his knee and bent his head upon his hand, thus shielding his face. Now and again his lips moved as if in prayer, but otherwise he remained as motionless as a bowed statue of grief. His over-sensitive conscience, only too quick to refer all error among his people to some fault or omission in his own ministry, was, indeed, suffering the most humbling pain. How poorly, then, had

he delivered Christ's perfect message to her!

In that moment all the dross of earthly feeling seemed to him to be consumed in the wrathful glance of a justly offended God. A mist swam before his eyes. The touch of a timid hand upon his arm seemed to bring him back into a strange world in which everything was unfamiliar. He slowly turned his eyes upon her, still not speaking a word.

"I did not think — that was very rude," she whispered, drawing a little nearer to him, half frightened at the sorrowful depths in his eyes, and hastening to atone. "Forgive me — I was not thinking what I said."

Something like a groan struggled to his lips. "Oh, child, child!" he murmured, brokenly and with such infinite pity and fervor in his voice. "If you would only believe that it is not *my*

pardon that you have need to ask —
not mine !”

Dorinda regarded him wonderingly for a moment. Afraid of again hurting him, she said nothing to this. Presently she reached down and gathered up her straw hat that had fallen to the ground. She began slowly to twist a garland of grape leaves about the brim, deftly tying the long stems with the delicate blades of blue-grass that shot up in a tiny border about the path.

She was reminded that it was growing late, and that it was time that she should take her leave, for already a flock of birds was circling toward the shadowy churchyard, coming home to their nightly quarters; yet she did not wish to make her departure too abrupt.

“Did your strawberries do well this summer?” she asked, irrelevantly,

glancing toward the sterile looking beds in the distance.

"Fairly well," he answered. "We seldom have a fine crop; but we need so few."

"We had a very fine crop, indeed. We made gallons of preserves." Then, a look of disgust tracing itself across her features and her brows contracting, "Ugh! how I hate strawberry preserves!" she asserted, violently.

"You mean you hate to eat them after they are made, or to make them before they are eaten, which?" he questioned, smiling a little, very patient with her, but still sorely troubled.

"Both. I meant to make them, though—to be mewed up all day over a hot stove stirring the horrid stuff with a spoon; that's what I hate most of all."

"It must be a tiresome thing to do," he admitted, sympathetically, readily throwing himself into an appreciation

of her woes. At the same moment it occurred to him that this was the first time that he had ever heard such a complaint from her. "The child has simply grown into a woman," he reflected; "her faculties need wider scope," and in this conclusion there seemed much to hope for, and only a little to regret; but it was the very womanliness that was in her to which he now strove to make appeal.

"Dorinda," he began in some hesitation, the broad charity by which he judged every action causing him to shrink from appearing in any way to condemn her, "do you ever try to think of how much happiness you are bringing into the lives of other people by being always the faithful, good, little girl you are in these simple household duties? If you would do that, it would make your tasks seem lighter, I am sure. Do you know," he went on, letting his thoughts

take the drift into which they so naturally tended, "it sometimes occurs to me that that is the whole meaning of the lesson of love: the sacrifice of self that always is involved. And who can calculate the value of these sacrifices upon character, or estimate what miracles love works in the human heart, even," and here he halted, his mind turning to his own recent struggle, "even to the extent of surrender of the object itself, when it would seem that some higher good is to be attained."

She gave a startled glance into his face, growing suddenly pale, and in that glimpse she discovered, in a bewildered fashion, that he too was undergoing some frightful inward strain, equal to, if not beyond, what the moment meant to her.

"Could you," and she breathed rather than spoke the words—"do you mean to say that you *could* give up the person

you loved to — to some one else — could you do that? ”

He looked away quickly for an instant, but she could see how the hand against the bench trembled, could hear his hurried breathing, as of one who runs a race, every nerve and muscle strained to reach the goal.

Without suspicion of the swift torrent of emotion which had forced the question to her lips, thinking rather of his own sorrowful renunciation, he compelled himself to answer her with what calmness he was able to assume.

“ With God’s help ” he said, huskily, “ I think I could, if I believed it to be His will. But it would be *hard*,” he cried, fiercely, his voice rising as all the pent-up control which he had so long practiced threatened to break loose, “ God knows it would be hard ! ”

The girl rose and slowly put on her hat.

"I must be going," she said, softly, not looking toward him.

They walked down the garden path to the gate leading out on the lane beyond. Only a word or two passed between them, from time to time ; but when they had reached the woods that adjoined her home, she insisted that he should go no further, and he obeyed her without protest. He was turning away, when, as by an impulse, he wheeled suddenly and held out his hand to her. She looked at it a moment as she placed her own in it ; browned and roughened as it was by work and exposure, it was yet the hand of a gentleman, manly and sincere. But even in that moment as her glances fell upon it, there arose in the young girl's mind a contrast with another hand with which she was well familiar : a hand of singular strength and beauty, whose touch was as fire to her.

"Dorinda," he said, simply, "if ever you are in any trouble, you know I am always your friend. It is often something to have a friend outside of one's own household, some one who can understand even better, perhaps, than it is possible for any of them. And we have known each other so long, so long—even Harvey himself can not know you as I do."

He had forced himself to speak that last, difficult as it was for him, but no sooner had he done so than he regretted his temerity. For the color that flamed over her in an overwhelming shame and confusion was a surer confirmation than he found himself yet strong enough to bear.

"You are always good to me," she managed to say, "and you know I thank you for—for your friendship."

Then she broke away, and soon the little pink, fluttering figure moving in

and out among the trees was only a blurred and indistinct vision.

He stood watching her, the sunlight falling in a flood of glory about her, the great human longing in him refusing to be silenced, until she had passed the summit of the hill, and the deep shadows, wrapping her in their purple mists, closed her from his view. Then it was there arose to his lips that same agonizing cry of contrition that once before that day had shaken him to the utmost foundations of his being: "Father, forgive me, I know not what I do!"

XII.

Beyond the crest of the hill the path crawled obliquely toward the heart of the wood and its cool, mysterious, many-voiced depths, wherein, always, lurking shadows seemed to brood, as if the nymphs of Artemis were hiding the purple garments of their weaving behind the bristling undergrowth and the luxurious tangle of clambering vines. At this hour, in the violet-tipped glimmer of the waning day, the very boles of the trees seemed to hold a grimness of suggestion and to dart blackly out of the murky light as if called into existence by some secret incantation at the whim of the presiding deity. Swarms of insects floated in the uncertain haze, and there was a clinging moisture in the air that betokened

rain, and which, laying hold of one's garments like a tangible thing, added to the weirdness of an effect heightened by rank odors and a vault-like oppression. Dorinda delighted in the spot. Here the savage instincts of her nature, breaking from their leash, could revel in a relaxation wholly unobserved, as there vaguely floated into her remembrance delightful intimations of mountain glen and cavern—the beloved environment of her earliest years.

When she had reached a favorite nook, well screened in its leafy inclosure, she threw herself full-length upon the turf in a freedom of abandonment that was all her own, and spreading out her arms to the wind as if inviting its approach, she half closed her eyelids in an ecstasy of release.

Her brain, throbbing painfully under the strain of weeks of pent-up emotion,

gradually became quieted, yielding to the soothing power of influences harmoniously blended to her mood. She even seemed to renew, in some occult fashion, a sense of kinship to the wild things about her, an affinity that they also appeared to perceive and dumbly to respond to. A flying-squirrel whirled above her head, and she gaily called to the little creature as it passed. It lit upon the tree under which she lay, showing no alarm when she arose and drew nearer, and a yellow-hammer, regarding her, for a moment, with an air of judicial neutrality, finally concluded that her presence was not to be resented as an offense, and also remained within touch of her hand.

She lay for a long time, absorbing through every channel of her being the magical spell of the forest, stirred with a deep, sensuous delight, and oblivious to everything save the witchery of the hour.

But she was presently startled by an unusual sight in that quarter of the plantation. A graceful, white-robed woman slowly sauntered down the cool, dim aisles, the sinuous undulation of her movement among the long grasses suggesting the stately progress of a swan over the blue-green waters of some wind-stirred lake. In an instant, another figure was indistinctly seen in glimpses through the bewildering network of the branches—the figure of a man walking with firm, brave step, now and then pausing in the earnest heat of conversation to turn his glances full upon the woman at his side, and always bearing himself loftily erect with a certain grave dignity of demeanor like a victor triumphing in his might, yet a little serious, as one should be, after a hard-earned conquest.

They were drawing nearer and nearer, Margaret's smooth voice in the

distance lending itself to Harvey's fervid tones, like a soothing flute-note to an impassioned obligato.

Benumbed, longing frantically for flight, yet powerless to move hand or foot, with hungry, burning eyes, and nostrils dilated in quick-recurring breaths, Dorinda lay peering through the thicket.

At the first sight of them, it was as if a sword of flame had pierced her through and through, and all her veins ran fire. But gradually a horrible stiffening seemed to possess her limbs; her eyes became fixed in their intensity of gaze; her lips were dry and parched. She crouched pantingly on her elbow, at one moment putting up her hands to her face to shut out the galling sight, the next, straining her eyes to get a better view of the resplendent woman whose beauty, if it had impressed her powerfully upon her last

witness of it, now, in the still bitterer pain of the present moment, seemed enhanced to a tenfold loveliness.

Margaret's thin gown, cool, restful to the eye under the green canopy, shone with a dazzling whiteness when an occasional ray of sunlight fell full upon her. All nature seemed showering benisons and approval. Birds sang blithely in the low boughs; the wild flowers lifted their heads and smiled; even "the thorn-tree had a mind to them" as they passed.

For a time their speech fell upon Dorinda's ear as only an indistinct murmur blending itself with the soft whispers of the wind in the shivering branches; but, as Margaret's light garments swept past the shadowy retreat where the young girl lay concealed, every word was plainly audible.

At the sound of Harvey's voice, Dorinda started, even half-rose to her

feet, as if distrusting her very ears, then sunk heavily back into the undergrowth, a wild, bewildered look overspreading her features; for, though belonging unmistakably to him, it was not the voice she knew. Low, vibrative, intense, it had completely lost the old careless, ringing tone, and seemed to contain deeper and altogether different shades of meaning — thrilling, harmonious, soul-stirring depths that had never waked for her. Something of its concentrated passion seemed to have communicated itself to Margaret. Her usual tranquillity had deserted her. She suddenly halted, as if putting a sharp check upon herself, veered abruptly to one side, hesitated, then drew a little nearer again, a look of almost terror in her eyes, as of one who yields, unwilling, to some mysterious, dominating power.

“I—I am not sure,” she whispered,

imploringly, motioning him from her, "even now, after all that has passed between us, I still am not certain of myself. I dare not consider what you will think. But these horrible doubts that come to me! They seem to reveal the weakness of my character as a mirror reveals a disfiguring blemish on a countenance otherwise not altogether poor and mean. Oh, do not think that I have not dreamed of being the perfect woman you think me. God knows I have dreamed of it. But I do not know myself. Do you remember my telling you once, just after I met you, of that feeling of distrust that I have always had as to how I should meet the supreme test of a woman's nature, if ever it should be offered to me? I do believe," and here she lowered her voice to a lingering, beseeching note of indescribable sweetness, "that it is being offered

to me now in the beautiful, perfect devotion you give me, and I—all unworthy as I am—I am not sure—I —”

He bent his head to her with a short, smothered laugh, and his gaze sunk ever deeper and deeper into hers until her eyes faltered and fell beneath his searching look. She tried to turn away, but his hands held her in their vice-like grasp. She was trembling and very pale. Then, suddenly, a wave of color swept over her.

“I am sure!” he cried, victoriously, as he caught her in his arms.

In another moment with both his hands he had lifted her face to his with an eager, unrestrained movement, and their lips met.

When, more than an hour later, Dorinda was able, with a mighty effort, to rouse herself from the trance-like

state that bound her, as if by invisible chains, to the spot, a gentle splashing was heard among the leaves overhead, and the woods had grown quite dark.

She lay for a time trying to collect herself, like one recovering from a blow severe enough to annihilate not only all physical strength but memory also. There was an odd sensation of dizziness in her brain; a wavering uncertainty in her vision. She drew a long, deep breath and looked about her.

Then the scene which she had just witnessed rushed over her in the full flood-tide of its meaning. She covered her face with her hands and cowered shivering among the branches.

After a while she staggered feebly to her feet, but her limbs were heavy and moved slowly, as with pain. There had been a slight rainfall, and now a pale, filmy mist, delicate as a bridal veil, hung over the earth. Thin, vapor-

ous clouds obscured the moon. She could barely find the path in the darkness. Her moist skirts kept up a dreary flapping about her ankles as she walked. Now and then a sleepy bird called drowsily to its mate, or an owl hooted ominously from the branches. She felt chilled and tired, tired to a degree that she had never known before.

When she reached the house, she had meant to go quickly to her own room to exchange her bedraggled garments and thus to escape notice, an instinct impelling her rather than conscious thought. But Micajah met her on the stairway. Alarmed by her long absence, the old man was just returning from her room, where he had been for the sixth or seventh time in quest of her.

Even in the dimly-lighted hall he could perceive the strange look which shone from her ashen face, and the

unnatural brilliancy of her dark, staring eyes. She shrank a little further into the shadow lest her dripping gown should betray her.

He stared uncertainly down upon her, his peaked features drawn into an expression of painful solicitude, the timid, appealing look in his sunken eyes intensified to an expression of dumb entreaty.

"Ye ben't ailin', D'rindy?" he cried, presently, the words breaking from his lips in a panic of foreboding that seemed all at once to reduce him to a state of utter limpness and indecision. He leaned heavily against the slender, old-fashioned balustrade, that creaked a little under the weight of his tall, bony frame, and waited for her to speak.

"No — no — I am not ailing," she said, hurriedly, but with a tinge of petulance. "What made you think that?"

Nothing ever makes me ill. I am *strong!*" A wan smile flickered about the little mouth, her enforced bravado belied by an aspect of weariness and ill-disguised suffering.

"Did I make you uneasy? I—I think I must have fallen asleep in the woods," she explained, steadying herself with an effort against the dark wall, yet holding her small head proudly, like a sapling recovering its wind-bowed form after a gust that has humbled it to the earth.

Micajah shifted his quid of tobacco to another position in his lank jaw, still keeping his eyes fixed upon her with curious intentness.

"Oneasy, D'rindy?" he repeated, in his slow, drawling tones. "Waal, I sca'cely think that my oneasiness air in the question, longside o' them white cheeks o' you-ns thet uster be pinker'n a peach-blow. I declar to goodness,

D'rindy," after a prolonged scrutiny, "a chipmunk ain't much littler!" But suddenly growing serious, he leaned quickly forward and again peered apprehensively into her face, as if aghast with a new and even graver misgiving.

"Thar ain't nothin' a-weighin' on yer sperrits, D'rindy, to make ye look so powerful pale an' puny?" he asked, softly, his voice trembling.

The girl started visibly, and he hurried on, as if dreading a verification of his fears. "Thar ain't nothin' I wouldn't give to see ye peart an' uppity, same ez ye uster be. Nary wild-cat thet I ever *seed*," with conscientious accuracy, dwelling with pride upon the subject of Dorinda's alleged ferocity of disposition, "nary wild-cat thet I ever seed kin hold a candle to ye when ye air riled. Lord, now thar jest ain't nothin' thet I wouldn't do for ye!"

he declared, breaking off in helpless confusion.

Dorinda assured him drearily that there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that he need attempt, and tried to move along; but he interposed, with considerable trepidation, "Cuz, if thar is anything thet ye'd like to hev me git ye—anything that I *kin* git ye," a crushing realization of his own limitation in all matters pertaining to a spiritual import weighing heavily upon him, "I low to git it, not countin' cost nor nothin.' Las' time I passed them big sto'es in Lexin'ton, I seed a yaller shawl a-hangin' in a winder thet'd set ye off might'ly. Thet young gal over to the Gin'ral's aint got nothin' thet's in sight of it, I'll be bound. I'd know what Marier'll hev to say about it," scratching his head a little dubiously, the reminder of his wife's economic tendencies and possible wrath at such

expenditure presenting itself with alarming distinctness, "but if yed like to hev it," bracing himself, as if the mild forces of his temperament were heroically preparing themselves to meet an assault, "I low to git it fer ye, sartin sure. Ye wouldn't like to hev a yaller shawl, now, would ye, D'rindy — to w'ar on Sundays to meetin' jest like a queen?" he inquired, somewhat hazy as to his ideas of royal attire in general, but little doubting that Dorinda, thus adorned, would equal it in splendor.

"No;" Dorinda answered despondently, a swift moisture springing into her dry, aching eyes, "I believe I don't care for a yellow shawl. I don't think there is anything you can get that will make me happy ever again," she suddenly admitted, a recklessness of despair breaking down her reserve, as the great wave of sorrow bowed her head. But in a moment she added, bitterly,

"I don't think that happiness and yellow shawls are—are just the same," her voice sinking into a little sob-like whisper that wrung his sympathetic old heart beyond the power of tears.

He swept the sleeve of his faded coat across his eyes with a hasty gesture, and was dumb.

"Thet's so, D'rindy," he acquiesced, after a long time, gazing sorrowfully down upon the dusty creases in his thick cowhide boots, and slowly shaking his head with philosophic conviction, "thet's so. Ye mought be no more'n a whitened sepulcher in thet same yaller shawl—fer all thet' it's so soft an' shiny with long fringe a-hangin to it like the silk on young corn—if ye air a-w'arin' a achin' heart in yer breast. But thar aint nothin' I aint ready to git ye—nothin' thet I *kin* git ye," he supplemented, sadly.

XIII.

Harvey Greer saw the wane of his golden days with a regret that was not wholly melancholy in that it was supported by the exhilarating power of a still more glorious anticipation. All that the past weeks and months had been to him he was no more able to compute than the earth can estimate the blessing of the sun that has warmed it into life and flower. Inspiring influences appeared to be at work in him — an increased mentality, a more vigorous imagination, and above all, a strengthening of the moral purpose, which up to this period of his career had been strangely dormant, being some of the results more plainly discerned of the new, revivifying force which had come into his life. In the

first hot rush of realization he had rather the feeling that happiness—that wild, poetic thing which had hitherto eluded him—had accidentally turned in her sudden swerving so as to be caught in his eager, outstretched arms. But he afterward rejected the idea as pagan. Finding in Margaret Pryor's classic loveliness the visible manifestation of all that his dreams had ever pictured, the final and only perfect embodiment of the ideal, his ardent temperament made it not difficult for him to invest her with an inward beauty of which the outward seemed merely a fitting and graceful expression. Those complex, mistifying intricacies of character which others found in her, therefore could not exist for him. Never had he allowed himself a doubt of her; too loyal a knight and true to mistrust her by a thought, whatever there was about her

likely to mislead was easily and satisfactorily explained as natural feminine inconsistencies which every man ought to expect and submit to from the woman he loves.

But there was an experience awaiting them to which he looked forward with a nervous apprehension that unconsciously implied a lack of faith — her meeting with his father and mother in their own home. That all there was to know of him and his parentage had been already explained to her by her relatives, the Pryors, it never occurred to him to question ; yet it was with a certain proud uneasiness that he impulsively made the proposition that they should go in, one afternoon, when their walk had led them quite in sight of his father's home.

Margaret had been, for some moments, admiring the quaint, variegated little structure with its gable roof and

tiny window panes; its light blue porch and green shutters producing an odd but not altogether inharmonious effect against the dull-red brick of the building. She acquiesced most graciously, her usual sweet placidity in no way disturbed at the thought of this introduction to his nearest relatives; but it seemed to her strangely out of order that he should ask her to make the first call. She glanced down at her pale green organdie a little dubiously.

"Isn't it rather—rather unconventional?" she suggested, pausing just outside the picket fence and twirling her white parasol in slight hesitation.

"Not in the least—that is, it will not be so regarded," he answered, stiffly, holding wide the gate for her to enter.

She glanced quickly up into his face and an amused expression flitted across

her features. She was silent. But as they approached the house from the side she uttered an involuntary exclamation:

“What a lovely, picturesque old man!” she cried, enthusiastically. “The overseer, is he not? No—no—you look in the wrong direction. There, right there, standing by the cistern!”

Micajah, having just drawn a pail of water, was leaning in a tired fashion against the tall, wooden pump, looking pensively out to the glowing west. He was in his usual work-a-day costume of blue jeans and cotton shirt. His fine head was bare, and the thick crop of iron-gray hair, which fell about his neck, probably, more than anything else, added the touch which so delighted Miss Pryor.

At her inquiry the young man started, looked quickly in the direc-

tion she indicated, then turned and faced her steadily, a quiet dignity manifesting itself in his words and manner.

"He is my father," he said, simply, after a moment, not a muscle of his face changing as he calmly made the statement.

Margaret drew back as if he had struck her. She grew white to the lips, a horrified expression dilating her eyes. Then she broke into a forced, nervous laugh, shrugging her shoulders with a gesture of annoyance, as she looked fixedly on the ground.

"That is almost too ancient a jest for perpetration," she said coldly, at length.

A hard look was settling upon Harvey's face. But the very sternness in his manner seemed to invest him with a certain loftiness which commanded her respect. She observed him narrowly, still ill at ease, and not a little disturbed that he should be guilty of

the bad taste of trifling with her in such a matter.

"Perhaps this differs somewhat from the jesting that you regard as too ancient for perpetration, since it is both novel and real," he said, dryly. "That is my father, as I have just explained. Will you come and let me make you acquainted with him?"

He was looking straight ahead of him in the direction where Micajah, who had not yet caught sight of them, was still standing, shading his eyes from the sun's red disk, his benign countenance mellowed by a peaceful contemplation, as the departing rays fell full upon him.

Harvey gave her a moment to recover herself, which she did with remarkable rapidity and in the thorough manner with which she always performed every act.

"Pardon me," she said, softly, but

with a slight constraint, "that was a brutal blunder." Then, as if nothing in the least unpleasant had occurred, she continued, suavely, "I shall feel it a very great honor to know your father. Will you introduce me, please?"

Harvey bowed gravely, and they both moved forward.

It was at this juncture that Micajah, hearing the low murmur of their voices, turned and rested his eyes upon them in much confusion.

As they approached, he stood shifting awkwardly from one foot to the other, having first lifted his gaunt frame into an erect, soldierly attitude, intending, in some way, to convey his appreciation of the dignity conferred upon him.

But Margaret was quick to relieve him of his embarrassment. A lovely, winning smile played about her face; she glided gracefully forward,

"Your son has been good enough to bring me to see you, Mr. Greer," she affirmed, with admirable tact. "I am Margaret Pryor," holding out her hand with the utmost simplicity, "I hope we did not startle you?"

The old man gazed a moment in a kind of amused hesitation before he took the "white wonder" of her ungloved hand into his own brown, horny grasp.

"Waal, I can't say ez that ye ain't serpreessed me jest a *leetle*," he granted, "seein' ye all of a suddent like, an' not hearin' the rustle of yer wings," a twinkle of merriment lighting his gray eyes in a quaint look of smoldering humor, "but ye air welcome, more'n welcome, thar ain't no doubt ez to thet."

Margaret kept up an easy flow of conversation between them as he hospitably led the way toward the house,

She appeared to be much interested in all that he had to say about the success or failure, as the case might be, of the "craps" that year, and even went so far as to assume an expression of the liveliest sympathetic interest when, in his sylvan realism, he told her of the sow that had been gored that day by the bull over in the north pasture, and of the Alderney heifer that had rashly jumped into a ditch and snapped her forelegs "teetotally, same ez a stick o' peppermint candy." She seemed in no way discomposed by Harvey's moody silence, graciously appealing to him from time to time, as if amiably willing to include him also in their charming discourse.

When they had reached the pretty vine-covered porch, with its great split-seated chairs, Micajah, seeing her evident wish to linger here, was painfully perturbed between a courteous desire

of yielding to a guest's pleasure and the dread of his wife's disapprobation if the righteous claims of the "parler" were thus lightly ignored.

"It air a sight cooler out hyah," he allowed, pausing on the threshold, "but Id'know what Marier'll hev to say about it," looking steadily down on his heavy boots in a feeble attempt to hide the shame of his timorousness, "Id'-know jest how she'd take it, if she was to come along and see ye settin' stiff ez a ram-rod on one 'o them hard cheers 'stid o' restin' easy an' comfortable-like on the settee in the parler. Lord, now, I don't take no stock in all them fine fixin's an' things, but *Marier* — waal, she sets a heap o' sto' by thet settee," he volunteered, in mild persuasion.

Possibly Miss Pryor felt the stirrings of a faint curiosity to test for herself the merits of the much lauded "settee," for she instantly arose and followed the

old man into the darkened apartment, which did not at once reveal the object of her search, as she was compelled to grope her way through an almost Cimmerian gloom, the damp, unpleasant odor of a room insufficiently aired being almost stifling.

It was altogether a most hideous room, producing the painful impression of possibilities overlooked, like certain undeveloped types of character that are yet suggestive of great capabilities and strength. It was low and square, possessing two broad, arched windows with many panes, and a cornice and center-piece of delicate workmanship. There were Nottingham curtains at the windows; a Brussels carpet on the floor, with stiff, rectangular figures; and a marble-slab table on which reposed a stand of flamboyant wax flowers, carefully guarded by a glass shade. There was also an old rattle-trap in the

shape of a square piano, which presented an appearance of gaping incompleteness, like a mouth denuded of some of its teeth, the result of the ivory having fallen from many of the keys. The "settee"—the fetich of Mrs Greer's adoration—proved to be a huge, unsightly, hair-cloth affair, decidedly worn and somewhat rickety in its legs; this was placed severely against the wall, as were also the stiff chairs, covered with the same chilly material and adorned with "tidies" done in bright red and yellow worsteds. Margaret, having allowed her eyes to roam about the room with rapid comprehensiveness, was finally forced to the conclusion that the one object on which her glance could rest with safety was the high, beautifully carved mantel with its wide, old-fashioned fire-place, into which a great bunch of sweet-fern, newly gathered,

had been thrown, the fragrant, aromatic herb offering a healthful contrast to the vases filled with dried grasses and everlasting plants.

Harvey's picture on the wall seemed to afford even a stranger incongruity than his presence. She glanced uneasily from it to him. Some painful metamorphosis appeared to invest him with an awkwardness she had never before discerned. She found herself regarding him critically and from a totally different point of view. She was conscious of an unreasoning irritation, a sense of wounded pride, even an impulse of cruelty, which made the curves about her beautiful mouth look as if carved out of marble.

They were quite alone, Micajah having left them on the threshold of the sacred precincts with a sly wink and the assurance that he'd "fetch Marier along soon ez she'd got on her Sun-

day clo'es," therefore some attempt at conversation was quite imperative. Margaret's manner of speaking the few commonplace words required, her accent of courteous affability, chilled the young man like the sound of clods falling upon a coffin. He presently adopted a tone that was as frigid as her own, finally wandering off into a stereotyped, didactic dissertation upon the relative charms of town and country life, which at any other time would have struck him as absurd.

It was, on the whole, a relief when his mother, after a considerable delay, finally presented herself, flushed and panting, in the doorway, Micajah proudly following in the distance.

In spite of Mrs. Greer's prolonged preparations, her appearance was that of one whose clothes had been hurled on with a pitchfork, instead of after the usual method. The buttons up

and down the taut waist of her black silk gown had been hastily and irregularly fastened, and gave the impression of being upon the point of completely bursting all bounds.

It was evident that, in her excitement, she had washed her face and smeared it over, while insufficiently dried, with a thick coating of powder, which now stood out in flakes, giving her a most peculiar, mottled aspect. She wore a full white ruche at the throat, which seemed to heighten the rubicund tints of her blonde complexion; and on the fat fore-finger of her right hand there was a gorgeous diamond ring, a huge cluster of tiny stones surrounding a larger one in the center.

She made several grotesque little dips of courtesies in the doorway, considerably abashed, yet presenting a bold front withal, as if, in betraying her dis-

comfiture, she was fearful of yielding a concession she was by no means ready to allow.

Whatever Miss Pryor's private opinion might have been regarding her prospective mother-in-law, it was to the credit of her good-breeding that she managed to assume all the outward deference and consideration she was able, under any condition, to display; but, at the same time, there was wanting a shade of the cordiality she was pleased to bestow upon Micajah's less pretentious and more agreeable form of welcome.

"I've been thinkin'," Mrs. Greer exclaimed, with an insinuating simper, "'twas 'bout time we was gettin' acquainted, my son there, bein' over at Grassland mostly all the time since you come; leastways we don't see nothin' of him these days," settling herself more comfortably in one of the hair-

cloth rockers and moving violently to and fro.

A cold look crept into Margaret's eyes; but she only smiled a little more sweetly, appearing not wholly to comprehend.

"The country is looking so green and beautiful after the rain," she said, cheerfully, changing the subject rather abruptly. "You can't think what a delight the woods have been to me all the summer."

Mrs. Greer stared.

"Well, the Lord knows it's *green*," she admitted, laughing, "an' its beautiful enough, too, I reckon, for them that likes it; but 'taint my taste. The country's too inhospitable for me," shaking her head in depreciation. "Give me a nice house in town, with an iron fence, an' velvet carpets, an' chandeliers, an' articles of virtue, with plenty of servants to keep 'em clean,

an' I'd be happy as a queen. I tell Micajah I'd sell the farm an' move right into Lexin'ton any day."

Margaret gave a quick, sympathetic glance in the direction of Micajah's subdued figure, the old man having slipped quietly into a chair in the corner.

"Oh, no, no — this charming old place! Mr. Greer is perfectly right in refusing his consent," she cried with sudden energy."

"As to Micajah's consent," Mrs. Greer replied, a little severely, "seein' that every blessed acre belongs to me — well, the trouble ain't so much to get Micajah's consent as to find a buyer," she broke off, with a caustic smile. "What with such a uproar" (Mrs. Greer was not above coining a word on occasions) "an' racket of hard times through the country — banks breakin', firms failin', hurricanes

blowin', an' the Lord only knows what's to happen next, buyers is scarce enough."

"Then, in the midst of the universal wreckage and instability, I think you might congratulate yourself upon the security of your own position," Margaret suggested, blandly.

"Oh, we're safe — safe as a body can be," she hastened to declare. "Harvey'll have a good, snug sum to fall heir to one o' these days," with a side-long leer, which Miss Pryor appeared to ignore. "Eight hundred acres of blue-grass lan' an' —"

But Harvey suddenly cut short her enumeration of his future possessions."

"Where is Dorinda?" he inquired, abruptly, springing to his feet. And then, before any one could reply, he had left the room, saying that he would go in search of her.

He finally came back without her,

however, and Margaret took occasion to bring the call to an end.

"Dorinda! So there is a sister, also," she mentally concluded as they left the house. "Heavens! Let us fervently hope that she's an improvement on the mother!" In truth she had suffered much, and was by no means up to her usual poise in spite of her very gracious adieux.

Just as they were turning out of the yard they encountered the object of her pious ejaculation. Dorinda was coming nonchalantly down the lane.

She was neatly dressed in a light blue gingham gown, and she was walking with a lithe, firm step, the spirited bearing of the little figure suggesting the swift movement of a gazelle as she darted in and out among the wild flowers near the hedge. Harvey's heart rejoiced at the sight of her. Here, at least, was one who would not

fail him. He called to her, almost gayly, as she approached :

“I have been searching for you everywhere, Dorinda. Where have you been hiding? This is Miss Pryor — I want you to meet her.”

Dorinda paused, as if brought to an unwilling halt, looked from one to the other slowly, scrutinizingly, from under her sullen brows, and rigidly closed her lips.

All at once a look of defiant hatred darted in a steely flash from her glance. Her form quivered passionately, and her color came and went with each uneven breath. She clasped and unclasped her hands in a fierce movement, at the same time giving a hunted, helpless look about her. Then, without so much as a word or nod, quick as thought, she darted past, and left them standing in speechless amazement looking after her rapidly retreating figure.

"What a beautiful, ferocious little creature!" Margaret exclaimed, as soon as she could get her breath. "I did not know that you had a sister."

Harvey, inexpressibly annoyed at Dorinda's most unaccountable conduct, and secretly deciding upon the form of punishment which experience had taught him to be best calculated to restore her to a more tractable condition—a complete ignoring of her behavior, answered a little absently, as he withdrew his eyes impatiently:

"I haven't—Dorinda is not a sister, but a distant cousin. Of course it comes to quite the same thing in the end, you understand."

A smile flitted across Miss Pryor's features. "Ah, I see," she answered, a light breaking in upon her.

During the remainder of the walk she was more sweetly courteous and more coldly formal than she had been

at any time in their acquaintance. It was not until they had reached the doors of Grassland that Harvey broke the constraint that had grown up between them, which he seemed to do by the mere force of his own magnetic power.

He bent down his head to her in parting with all the old freedom of abandon, making a sudden gesture, as if he would dash away the mere cobwebs of hinderance the afternoon had revealed. But his face betrayed the agonizing dread in his heart.

"Margaret!" he cried, "Oh, Margaret!" The tense ring in his voice thrilling her again with the same sweet, irresistible sway.

She drew back, hesitated, then slowly, almost sadly, lifted her eyes to his.

" 'Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!'"

she whispered, under her breath. Then, still laughing that vibrating, enigmatical laugh of hers, she slipped lightly from his grasp into the great, dark hall, and in a moment he heard the patter of her footsteps up the spiral stair.

XIV.

Scurrying storm-clouds swept themselves across the lucid sky like a frown suddenly gathered upon the brow of a serene human countenance. Dorinda, sitting in the low window-seat of the darkening room, drew short, uneven breaths, as she pressed her burning cheek against the pane. The rising gale was an intoxicating draught filling her veins with fire. There was a peculiar glisten in her great, dark eyes. She clasped her hands with spasmodic energy. The giant oaks swayed and trembled in the blast as if their very roots were about to be upturned from the earth, and the western hills were lit with a lurid glare. Dorinda's lips half parted in a smile. The wind whis-

tling through the branches was some wierd flute-note of prophecy calling to her troubled soul; the swift eddy of swirling leaves and grasses, a blinding force, cruel and irresistible; and all the ominous rumbling of the approaching storm a deep organ-note of accompaniment lending itself to her own wild mood.

She did not hear the door open and quietly close behind her, nor the sound of hurried footsteps across the floor. But in the next moment there came one of those intense flashes of lightning which seem to lay bare the minutest detail of surrounding objects, and before there followed the terrific reverberating peal that dulled her senses, in the brilliant revelation she saw Harvey standing at her side, his face white and anxious, his manner alarmingly suggestive.

Even in that instant of awful, indefi-

nite foreboding, the thought that he himself was free, at least from bodily harm, came to her with an almost appalling sense of relief. A horrible pang shot through her and she felt her heart stand still as if stunned by the mere realization of all that he was to her.

"What is it?" she panted, involuntarily holding out both her hands to him, "Oh, Harvey, what has happened?" The words were like a sob.

"I have only a moment in which to tell you," he answered, quickly. "Come with me and I will explain everything as we go along." He led the way from the room, and she followed silently, his suppressed nervousness instantly communicating itself to her in a kind of electric shock.

"Get your hat and something to wrap around you," he commanded, as they passed through the hall. "Here,

this is the very thing," and he caught up his mother's heavy, dark shawl from the rack, and pinned it closely about the little slim figure. "Now, there!" he exclaimed, glancing down with satisfaction upon her mummy-like appearance, "you can't possibly get wet through that, I'm sure."

They were now out under the threatening sky, and he was hurrying her along in the direction of the stables.

"You see, I am taking your goodness all for granted, Dorinda," he said, very gently. Becoming suddenly conscious of her quick breathing against his arm, he suddenly drew up and glanced a little anxiously into her face.

"You poor child, it was a cruel shame to frighten you like that," he cried.

"No — no," she made haste to answer, distressed beyond measure that Harvey in his great need should find her a weak and unreliable sort of person,

"I—I am not frightened—in the least."

"The trouble is just this," he stated, briefly. "One of the children over there," nodding in the direction of Grassland, "is desperately ill, dying perhaps, and both the father and mother were suddenly called to Louisville last evening. Doctor Marshall wants a consultation. I am on my way to town for a physician; we were afraid to trust a servant; everything depends upon the utmost haste. Mar— Miss Pryor is alone. Dorinda *will* you go to her? Will you do this thing for me?"

They had reached the stable and his hand was on the door. "I have saddled Lightfoot, and have explained to mother," he said hurriedly, turning toward her.

But the girl's figure, had, all at once, grown strangely rigid and unyielding, the look of sympathy he had expected

to see upon her face being supplanted by an aspect of sullen indifference which baffled and pained him considerably. He drew a little nearer, thinking perhaps he had not read her features aright in the thickening gloom.

"There is absolutely nothing to do," he declared, encouragingly, "no responsibility whatever—I only thought that your presence might be a comfort to—Margaret," speaking the name with hesitation.

This reluctance cut Dorinda like a scourge. A sudden flame leaped from her eyes for an instant and then the lashes were lowered.

"I will not go!" she said, defiantly. Harvey turned and stared. He had been fitting the key in the lock of the stable door, bending down his head to find the place.

"Pardon me," he replied, stiffly, raising himself to his full height before

her, "of course I had no right to ask so great a favor."

A storm of passionate color swept over the girl's face, and a spasm of pain contracted the muscles about the sensitive mouth. But when she spoke again he was startled at her unnatural pallor.

"What does she want of me?" she broke forth, maddened at his calm. "What comfort would *I* be to her with her grand ways—what is that little sick child to me!" she flung out her arms with a cry of savage bitterness.

He answered in the same cool, measured tone of displeasure, "Nothing—nothing more nor less than the thought of all suffering and misfortune ought to be to every human creature. But even if this does not touch you, I had supposed that you cared enough for me to make a sacrifice for my sake."

Sacrifice!

At the sound of that word the girl

started, uttered a low, smothered moan, and drew back, staring wildly at him; for had she seen it by some necromantic art suddenly sketched upon the firmament before her in letters written with a blazing brand, it could not have stood out with more awful distinctness and significance of import. If he had used any other word to convey his meaning, the probability is that she would have still remained obdurate, a little white statue of cruelty and hate. But by one of those dramatic strokes of destiny, whereby there is offered an eternal choice for good or evil, that was the word he used, and at the sound of it a violent trembling seized her limbs. She felt her teeth chattering in her head, her breath coming in gasps. She could have lifted up her voice and shrieked from the very agony of the tension she was enduring, as there came back to her the speech the young min-

ister had made that afternoon in the old garden, which, day and night, had haunted her ever since :

“The whole meaning of love is sacrifice !”

How the words kept thrusting themselves, like a visible thing upon her; how they surged, and sounded, and deafened, with their ceaseless clamoring! How they tortured her!

She felt her will, for the first time in all her existence, beginning to give way; terrible, conflicting emotions seemed warring in her, pulling her now this way, now that way, as if the very angels of light and darkness were wrestling in that sublime and noiseless conflict. There was yet a moment of waiting, of horrible indecision; then, like a flower breaking suddenly into life and beauty, there came the glorious awakening—the marvelous birth of the soul!

The little head drooped upon her

breast, the color slowly drifted back into the white face, grown, all at once, soft and mobile. With a smile, radiant and inexpressibly tender in its maiden sweetness and dignity, she sprang lightly into the saddle without a word.

"God bless you, Dorinda!" he cried, holding her cold hands one moment closely in his own. Then he pressed a little nearer to her, "I am so glad I was not mistaken, after all," he said, fervently, in a low voice.

In less than five minutes afterward, she heard the clatter of his buggy wheels out on the rocky lane, and knew that he was straining every nerve to make up for the time she had lost him.

And oh, that mad, exciting ride through the forest, under the crackling boughs, with the blue flashes of lightning, and the peals upon peals of thunder!

Now there fell a great splash, like a

ghostly touch on her cheek, now an eerie, mournful cry broke upon her ears, as some startled creature of the woods darted obliquely across her path, causing her horse to swerve violently to one side. It had grown quite dark, and she had lost the path. But she pressed onward through the inky blackness, cutting her way into the night, feeling neither cold, nor fatigue, nor fear, her heart swelling with an inconceivable joy and triumph. And always, and always, and always, above the rage of the mighty tempest and the night-wind's sougning dirge, like a blast from a silver trumpet, there rang out the words the young minister had spoken that day in the garden, all unmindful of his own loneliness and sorrow:

“The meaning of love is sacrifice!”

When, in an incredibly short space of time—a little more than two hours

later — Harvey returned from Lexington with the man of skill, who was to bring healing in his touch, Margaret's voice greeted them cheerfully from the doorway, as the young man sprang quickly up the steps at Grassland.

"Edward is better — much better," she cried, "I think you really need not have gone, after all," glancing beyond him toward the burly form of the hale, white-haired old gentleman who, with slow dignity, was just emerging from the shadow, taking off his gloves and rubbing his hands together with a rapid, nervous movement.

But just at the moment when the introduction might have been expected, Harvey suddenly turned aside, his eye caught by an object all at once revealed by a moving flare of light from an upper chamber window, as of some one carrying a lamp about the room. He leaned forward, a little blinded by the

yellow blur of the old hall. Something dark and still was lying in a strange, crumpled fashion a few yards to the left of the building near the curbing.

"Dorinda -- Dorinda has been with you?" he asked, quickly, the words almost choking him in their utterance, still looking toward the distorted, motionless thing near the curbing in a kind of fascinated stare.

"Dorinda?" Miss Pryor repeated, bewildered. She threw a glance over her shoulder to him, at a loss to understand, then suavely held out her hand to the doctor, with a charming smile.

With a stifled cry, the dawning horror in his eyes freezing into a glassy fixedness of look, Harvey ran swiftly down the steps. Unable to act or think, spell-bound, he bent a moment above the little, lifeless figure. Then he gently put back the dark covering

about her face, and with a groan he gathered her into his arms.

As he came forward, staggering under the weight of his light burden, his face set and stony in its expression of impenetrable rigidity, Margaret, who had been conversing with the doctor, looked up, checked the exclamation that rose involuntarily to her lips, and quickly threw wide the doors for him to enter. It was evident from what followed that she had perceived the entire situation at a glance.

Being a woman of steady nerves, having herself always well in hand, she was capable of performing with the utmost ease what many a person similarly situated, through an excess of sympathy, and appalled by the mental shock, would have either utterly failed in, or done too blunderingly to be of use.

She spoke a few low, hurried words

to the physician, as she led the way to a bedroom at the farther end of the hall.

When they had placed her on the bed, Margaret bent above the girl, and with deft, delicate touch, unfastened the clumsy shawl in which she was entangled. There was a dark bruise on one side of the head, and the eye lids were half closed. There was not the smallest flicker of consciousness.

Dorinda lay motionless above the white coverlet, the little pale, upturned face strangely appealing even in its look of death.

Margaret began to move softly about the room, busying herself in the prompt execution of all things needful, but asking no unnecessary questions.

The physician placed his ear against the girl's heart. After a moment that seemed like hours he lifted his head. Harvey pressed eagerly forward, then

set his teeth in a hard, flint-like expression as he met the man's eyes.

"This is very serious," the doctor said, gravely. "But the heart still beats." Then he walked across the room and laid his hand gently on the young man's arm as he led him to the door, speaking a word or two.

Once outside the room, Harvey's pent-up anguish of apprehension seemed to find some slight relief in movement. With long, nervous strides he paced up and down the hall, his head bowed as if in deep thought, his hands clasped behind him, his face seamed with pain.

He had not dared to put the question, "Will she live?" But after a time he began to blame himself for his cowardice, the suspense was so terrible. A cold perspiration stood out on his brow, and an icy hand seemed grasping his heart.

When he entered the room again, the physician was speaking in a quiet voice to Margaret, after the prolonged and careful examination.

"She may continue in this condition for a considerable time. If she recovers consciousness at all, and speaks, she will perhaps be delirious. There are several very grave complications, and brain fever will probably ensue. You can take me now to the sick child — there is no danger that I will be needed here for a while."

When they had both gone, Harvey sat down by the bed. His eyes seemed to rivet themselves upon the beautiful, still face, as if he would fix eternally upon his memory every line and feature. He was utterly despairing.

By and by a sense of awful proprietorship seemed to possess him, sitting thus alone with her in the dim light. He leaned above her until his lips

almost touched her brow, timidly stroking the masses of bronze hair falling loosely about her. Her eyelids were closed now, and she appeared to be sleeping peacefully. Something in the way the jetty lashes swept her cheek, the childish look of the slim form, filled him with a passion of remorse and overwhelming pity. A groan struggled to his lips. He bowed his head in his hands and his frame shook.

About an hour afterward, Margaret, passing the door on some errand for the sick child, entered softly. Harvey rose as she approached, but did not resign his place. They were both silent.

Margaret stood for some moments at the foot of the bed, looking sadly down on its occupant. She had put on some kind of loose, white gown, and her golden hair was gathered into a low coil at the back of the neck. The gravity in her great, mournful eyes

seemed to lend a womanly sweetness to her whole attitude; but she was perfectly calm.

Presently her expression changed. Her eyes were fixed now upon Harvey in a look of surprised inquiry. She appeared to be studying him intently. But the young man seemed oblivious of her presence, wrapped in his own gloomy thoughts.

As they stood thus, all at once there was a faint flickering of the waxen eyelids, a feeble, convulsive little sigh, and Dorinda slowly opened her eyes.

With a startled cry Harvey sank on his knees at her side, and Dorinda, reaching up her arms to him with the trustful movement of a child, drew his head down to hers.

"Good bye, dear," she whispered;
"good bye!"

XV.

The view from the windows of the boarding house looking out upon the quiet streets of the old Virginian town was more than ordinarily depressing on a dreary January afternoon.

After several languid but finally successful struggles with the wintry clouds, a sickly sun was beginning to gild the distant church spire and to gleam upon the lingering patches of snow in the fence corners, producing something of the same disheartening sensation one experiences in witnessing a forced and spiritless effort begun at the end of a wasted existence.

With an energetic jerk that furlled the ugly green blind in a flash to the ceiling, Harvey turned to stir the fire

in his open stove to a brighter blaze, at the same time casting an impatient glance about the bald, cheerless looking room in which, for the past four months, his nights and part of his days had been spent.

"Confound it," he exclaimed, reflectively to himself as he vigorously applied the poker to the smoldering coals, "if only a fellow could rid himself of certain notions of comfort, many of them false enough I haven't a doubt, there is no reason at all why he might not flourish in a barn, or a pig-sty for the matter of that. But, thank Heaven, the place is clean, at all events!" he mentally concluded, stretching out his hands to the flame and sinking into the one comfortable chair the room contained, with the air of a man willing to extract from the situation whatever small grain of consolation such an admission would allow.

The desire, almost the necessity, for luxury, through a love of all the warm, bright, beautiful things the earth contains, was so essentially a part of his organism that even to Harvey Greer himself—when the subject did not serve as a target for epigrammatic flings at his own expense—it was often a matter of amusing conjecture whence had sprung those fixed, unconquerable instincts of his nature which could not be traced to any hereditary influence or tradition, and which no possible condition of deprivation seemed able to destroy.

But his thoughts on this particular afternoon were retrospective in the main. After all, the four months showed up in a fairly respectable record. Being a brilliant mathematician, and possessing a most fortunate manner—courteous, deferential, yet in a high degree positive and self-reliant

—he had taken good standing among the faculty at once, and his collegiate duties had been engrossing if not wholly to his taste. It was always a matter of regret to him that that old dream of a purely literary profession was thus, for a time, interfered with, through a manly realization of the importance of entering at once upon a vocation yielding a more speedy independence; but, with the characteristic confidence of his temperament, he never, for an instant, quite abandoned the idea that he would some day do great things in this most alluring line of work.

However, in this brief time, he had written only one thing — a dainty, little fragment in the form of a prose-poem which was accepted by one of the leading magazines, and, remarkable to say, published at once in the January number. For his own part, he thought little

enough of the effort, but possibly induced by some such motive as led Dante to paint the picture of an angel for his Beatrice, and Raphael to become a poet for "his lady of the sonnets," he wrote it for the woman he loved, feeling a sense of infinite delight in this new departure, which could have been made but for her sake alone. Besides, it was his only method of communication, since she had imposed the strictest silence upon him.

Margaret's wish that there should be positively no letters between them for a certain period, her desire that she should be left entirely free from any influence of his presence or the expression of his devotion was an exaction which appeared to him at first as an unreasonable absurdity that she should not have demanded. For a time he chafed under the restraint; and the self-control which the peculiar situation forced him to prac-

tice frequently reduced him to a state of irritability that would have ended in a complete revolt against the severity of her measures, had he not been governed by a feeling somewhat coinciding with her own. He wished her to be entirely certain of herself, and he felt that the security of affection, which would come from this long, unfettered communing with her own heart, could only be productive of a broader comprehension and the utmost of happiness to them both. With a man incapable of rising to the height of perfect faith on account of some lack of earnestness and sincerity in himself, such a view of the case would have been an impossibility; to a weak nature nothing is so difficult as silence.

Since that dark, tragical night at Grassland, it seemed that an eternity had passed. Margaret had left two days later, and their parting had been brief

and unsatisfactory. Everything connected with the night was like a kind of confused and troubled dream which haunts the recollection yet never clearly unfolds its meaning. In that hour, when a little life had faltered, as if hesitating between time and eternity — had seemed to waver a moment, flicker, and then expire, all thought of self had been completely swallowed up.

But Dorinda had drifted slowly, and it appeared almost regretfully, back to consciousness and strength.

After a long illness of many anxious weeks her health was finally restored. Yet it was a new Dorinda that looked out upon the world with serious, quiet eyes, as if there had been revealed to her in that strange wandering of the spirit things not lawful to be uttered. However, this change was not fully manifest to Harvey Greer, whose duties had called him elsewhere almost as

soon as the crisis in her condition had been passed.

He frequently thought of the girl as he sat alone in the winter evenings. Sometimes he saw her as the spirited, vivid little creature she had appeared in those first weeks after his return in the summer; again, her paleness, the quick start, the dumb, beseeching terror in her eyes when he had unexpectedly come upon her, and, above all, that last, heartrending cry of farewell when her arms had clung about him, were like a fierce stab of reminder, filling him with a sense of guiltiness he found it impossible to subdue.

So many things recalled her to him. Sometimes, as at the present moment, the swift picture came with the clear, ringing laugh from some fresh young voice passing in the streets.

He rose and went to the window. Everything was still. Had he fallen

asleep and dreamed of that ripple of mirth and sweetness that still mocked his ears? The room had grown hot and oppressive. His head ached as if bound by a tightening cord. He could not shake off the sense of utter misery that suddenly possessed him. Man-like, he began at once to combat the painful emotion. He put on his overcoat and hat and went out for a long walk into the country.

The crisp, icy air seemed to clear his brain. Gradually his old elasticity of spirits began to assert itself. He met a few people he knew, and bowed to them cheerfully as he passed. Health was so vigorous, hope still so strong in him; it seemed such a glorious good thing just to be allowed to walk the earth and to revel in the delight of mere living. In lieu of his former depression, an unnatural sort of buoyancy appeared to possess him, as if all his

nerves were strained to some great anticipation.

He was passing the post office. Perhaps there was a letter for him and that accounted for the feeling. If only she had written at last! By this time she must have seen the magazine. He began to think of the scrap with a certain feeling of complacency; it seemed rather a pretty and poetic way of making her understand how his heart burned and ached and hungered for her, how absolutely he trusted her. Did she tremble when she read his message—a page that all the world might read, yet throbbing with love for her and fervid as if a coal from his altar fires had dropped upon the words and set them all aflame? Did her cheeks glow with the triumph—did she shiver and grow pale, awed into a rapturous stillness through the mystery and the joy?

He was right, there was a letter; but

it bore a foreign post-mark and the address was traced in a firm, even style more suggestive of a man's than a woman's handwriting. He thrust it into his pocket with a chill of disappointment and turned his steps homeward, feeling as if he had met with a rebuff.

But when he had reached his room, he experienced some curiosity regarding the author of the letter. He lit his lamp and sat down before the fire. The letter lay upon the little table at his side, the unfamiliar chirography challenging him to break the seal; but he still delayed, a vague feeling of resentment possessing him as a reaction from his high anticipation.

Presently, with an expression of indifferent interest, he moodily tore open the envelope and began to read :

"Grand Hotel de Louvre, Paris, December the twenty-ninth." His eye

ran carelessly over the closely written page.

Suddenly a ghastly pallor overspread his face; he leaned forward that the light might fall to better advantage, but his hand shook so that he could not see the words. With a powerful effort of self-mastery he steadied himself and read on to the end. Then, like one who has received the death-wound in his heart, he put up his hand to his brow, bewildered, maddened with rage and torture, and with a groan his head fell forward on his breast.

The letter ran :

“I know nothing I can ever say or do will make you believe that I suffer — horribly, and beyond the power of any words to express — in feeling myself under the necessity to write this letter. I realize that hereafter I shall always remain in your thoughts as an entirely heartless and calculating type of woman

incapable of either sympathy or regret. But it is my very capacity to feel both that is the cause of your momentary unhappiness. This is not a paradox. The explanation of it all is to be found in the insufficiency of my own nature. The fault is in my weakness, not in any lack of strength in you; for if you had not possessed almost the strength of a god, you would not have had power to hold me as you did against my inclination, my better judgment, and in spite of my most strenuous effort to resist a fascination that seemed to exist for me from the first moment that our eyes met. I have not been insincere—I loved you—but away from you, in the long interval of reflection that your great generosity has allowed, I have discovered, fortunately for us both, before it was too late, that I did not love you enough. As a woman surrounded by the glamour of social place and the in-

fluences of a life spent out in the world, because of the halo that your imagination has thrown about me, I have offered, and possibly, if this environment could be maintained, would continue to offer something to you to admire, for a time. As your wife, leading the prosaic life of the quiet village in which your lot seems to be cast, I should soon, too soon, in both your eyes and my own, lose what little charm I may ever have possessed. But a little more, and I might have overlooked all the difficulties that must appear; but I have had my crucial test—the test I told you that I longed for—and my character stands at last revealed in its true light. Will you believe me when I tell you that I turn away shudderingly from myself? I do not think in all this great, sad world there is truly a more pitiable being than the one who is capable of conceiving and desiring a

great affection and is yet unable to make the sacrifices for love's sake that love demands.

“It is the highest, and the highest only, that you have dreamed of. Nothing else could ever satisfy you. And I believe, through that power of pre-science that seems to lend itself to certain moments—I do believe, as surely as I am making you suffer to-day, that the time of your rejoicing is yet near at hand. But such love as I saw in that poor child's eyes when she thought herself to be dying is something that I can never give to you, nor to mortal man. To feel it, to be able to rise to one such moment of supreme elevation of soul as was hers; to know the thrill, the unspeakable joy of such self-forgetfulness, I would be willing to walk until I was footsore and heart-weary to find the pure shrine of that high altar—and even death itself would not seem too great a price.

“Farewell—I wish that my letter might have ended here. Will you loathe me, will you scorn me when you have read the rest?

“I am here with my mother, in Paris, where we have been for the past six weeks, or more. I shall be married on the 3d of March to Mr. Edward Leeds Van Ousten, of New York City.

“Forgive—forget—

“MARGARET PRYOR.”

XVI.

Five months later, on a sultry June evening, Harvey Greer drifted casually into a New York theater; but it was a momentary impulse, rather than a pre-meditated desire for light opera, that led him to turn, after passing the building, and retrace his steps. It had suddenly occurred to him that as good an opportunity as was likely to present itself was thus afforded to cut short the morbid train of thought into which, in spite of every effort of will, he continually reverted, when left to his own solitary companionship for an hour.

He was greatly changed. The old boyish look of hope and zest was gone, vanished as completely as if years had passed over his head; as if all the deep,

tragical meaning of existence had unfolded itself to him, leaving, in the place of his joyous youth, only a spirit of stern resistance to fate. About the once carelessly happy mouth there were lines of bitterness and ineffectual struggle. He was pale and much thinner than heretofore. Although in his bearing there was still that air of distinction that was essentially his, it seemed that the warmth had forever faded from his smile, and in his eyes there were depths, hard and inscrutable, as of one who broods continually upon a wrong. One would scarcely have known him for the same generous, sunny-hearted, and thoroughly charming young man whose trustfulness of heart and grace of manner had won such hosts of friends. There was even something repellent in the austerity of his expression: so forbidding are the marks upon the human countenance of a grief rebelled against and defied.

When he had reached a seat he made a brief survey of the brilliantly lighted opera house, experiencing a sense of relief that, out of the hundreds of assembled faces, there appeared, at first glance, to be none familiar to him. But his circle of acquaintances was large, and as the new opera had met with considerable popularity with a certain set, after a moment he began to regret that he had selected this particular theater; some people he knew — friends at whose houses he had once visited — were coming into the boxes.

His seat was an obscure one, and after the first knowledge of their presence, he kept his eyes fixed steadily on the stage, conscious of a morose unwillingness to be observed. The sight of these people recalled painfully the circumstances connected with his last most agreeable meeting with them just after landing in New York a year before, his

feeling of hopefulness and enthusiasm, at that time, being brought into sharp contrast by a contemplation of the totally different emotions with which he would set sail for Europe on the following day for a three-month's vacation.

The second act was about to be completed; but the music had failed to interest him. With a yawn and a bored expression, he was deciding to take leave, when, as the curtain rang down, there was a slight stir among the audience, like a wave of wind sweeping over a field of wheat bending it in one direction, and almost simultaneously every glass was leveled at a single point. Involuntarily, Harvey turned also.

A short, stout young man with an auburn beard cut in the pointed fashion of the day, and with a manner somewhat foreign and elaborate was bowing

a graceful woman in diaphanous white into the farthest box on the right.

The woman's face was partly concealed on account of her position in the box, only her golden hair gleaming against the crimson curtain, and the stately poise of her head were visible to Harvey Greer, yet he started with a nameless fear, as his indifferent glance took in the scene. He felt the blood surge to his temples, a fierce, blinding stab at his heart. In another instant, with the air of a woman generously willing to bestow her loveliness upon all, Margaret slowly turned her face toward the audience, in a brilliant, lingering smile.

From all sides there were whispers of rapturous admiration; occasionally, Harvey could catch a word, a careless jest. Apparently the stage could offer nothing in rivalry to this glittering new beauty who it was evident had turned

the heads of some of the most fastidious with her charms. The box was rapidly filling; men crowded around her from every direction, receiving each the same serene, but flattering welcome in acknowledgment of his homage. Thus surrounded, radiant with youth and happiness, one could almost wonder if those glowing eyes had ever known what it was to shed a tear, if the curves of those perfect lips had ever trembled at thought of the pain, the cruelty, the sorrow of the world.

And seeing her thus, the beautiful, soulless creature that she was, all at once, as if the chains that her enchantment had woven about him had been suddenly broken, in a startling revelation to Harvey Greer there came a triumphant moment of release!

That one sight of her had done for him what, otherwise, years might not have accomplished.

He sank back into his seat, his hands nervously clutching the sides of the chair, his face pale and rigid.

Presently, for a certain effect, the lights throughout the entire building, with the exception of a feeble glimmer about the stage, were instantly lowered; yet that faultless profile seemed to glisten like a star in the midst of encompassing gloom. He could not take his eyes away. But as he gazed, his heavy breaths coming stormily, his heart torn with powerful emotions, and his brain reeling from the shock, in a kind of savage elation the realization flashed unalterably upon him at last that it was before his own ideal he had worshiped—that immaculate vision of true womanhood that never could be dimmed — not her — *not her!*

At the same moment, in one of those strange hallucinations which, under a great excitement, the mind finds

not difficult to take for reality, there looked forth from behind the crimson curtain another face, not less beautiful in its way, but purer, in that the soul that shone from the dark eyes was unspotted by the world, and infinitely lovelier because of its suggestion of a boundless capacity to love and suffer — Dorinda's face, fresh and dewy as a flower.

As in a dream, he rose and left the theater. The sound of the orchestra was like the blare of a thousand brazen instruments in his ears. The sea of faces swam before his eyes. His brow felt scorched as if bound with flame.

Out in the streets, under the silent stars, the heart of the great city seemed throbbing always with a ceaseless pain. A great wave of unselfish sorrow swept over him, a despairing sense of his own powerlessness to right the wrong, his utter weakness to comprehend. Gradu-

ally, as the contemplation of the deeper mysteries of existence took stronger hold upon him, all that he himself had been called upon to endure began to sink into insignificance at the thought of the accumulated suffering that for ages upon ages had swept over the world.

He walked for hours, feeling neither desolate nor alone, because of some wondrous uplifting power that had lent clearness to his vision, new strength to his purpose.

In his pocket there was a letter, the familiar childish scrawl on the back of the envelope readily revealing the identity of the writer. In the haste of his preparations for to-morrow's voyage, the little missive, received that afternoon, had as yet remained unopened. But Dorinda's message of farewell had come to feel like a sentient, breathing thing as it pressed against his heart.

Soon his pulses began to bound with an almost painful intensity. Thoughts and recollections that heretofore he had pushed back from him, now came crowding upon him, overwhelming him in their confirmation of a joy beyond belief. A passion of tenderness, of remorse for all that she must have suffered, an appalling realization of his own unworthiness shook him like the grasp from some mighty hand.

He had reached the hotel. He hurried to his room, quickly turning on the lights.

As he took the little envelope from his pocket, an awful foreboding and doubt assailed him. What change might those nine long months, since he last saw her, have wrought in her? If he should be making a mistake, after all! If it should be that she did not care! He well knew that, whatever she might write, between the lines

there would be something — something that would betray her against her will.

His hand trembled as he broke the seal. A heavy moisture had gathered upon his brow. The room whirled and swayed before him. Every nerve seemed strained. He opened the envelope.

There were only a few short sentences, but as his glance fell upon them, he started and grew pale — as if terrified at his own happiness. The paper fluttered from his grasp, and he bowed his face in his hands.

“Good bye, dear,” she wrote, “good bye!” unconsciously using the very words that had been wrung from her heart that night when she thought she was bidding him an eternal farewell.

The night wind stole in at the windows and stirred the hair about the young man’s temples, reminding him

in some vague, delicious fashion, of the silken rustle among the trees near his bed-room in his old home in Kentucky. But in the deep thankfulness that possessed him — a thankfulness for what had been withheld as well as given, there was little room for other thought.

Presently he lifted his face, transfigured by a marvelous light. His lips parted, moved, yet uttered not a sound, as there rose from the uttermost depths of his soul a wordless prayer — the profoundest of all worship.

Some moments afterward, something in the disorder of the room — his trunks half-packed for the voyage on the morrow — caught his eye with a special significance. A sudden warmth overspread his face. His heart throbbed in its excess of joy. He arose and turned out the lights, that he might be alone with the sacredness of his own thoughts.

332 YOUNG GREER OF KENTUCKY.

For he knew that on the morrow the steamer would sail without him.

THE END.

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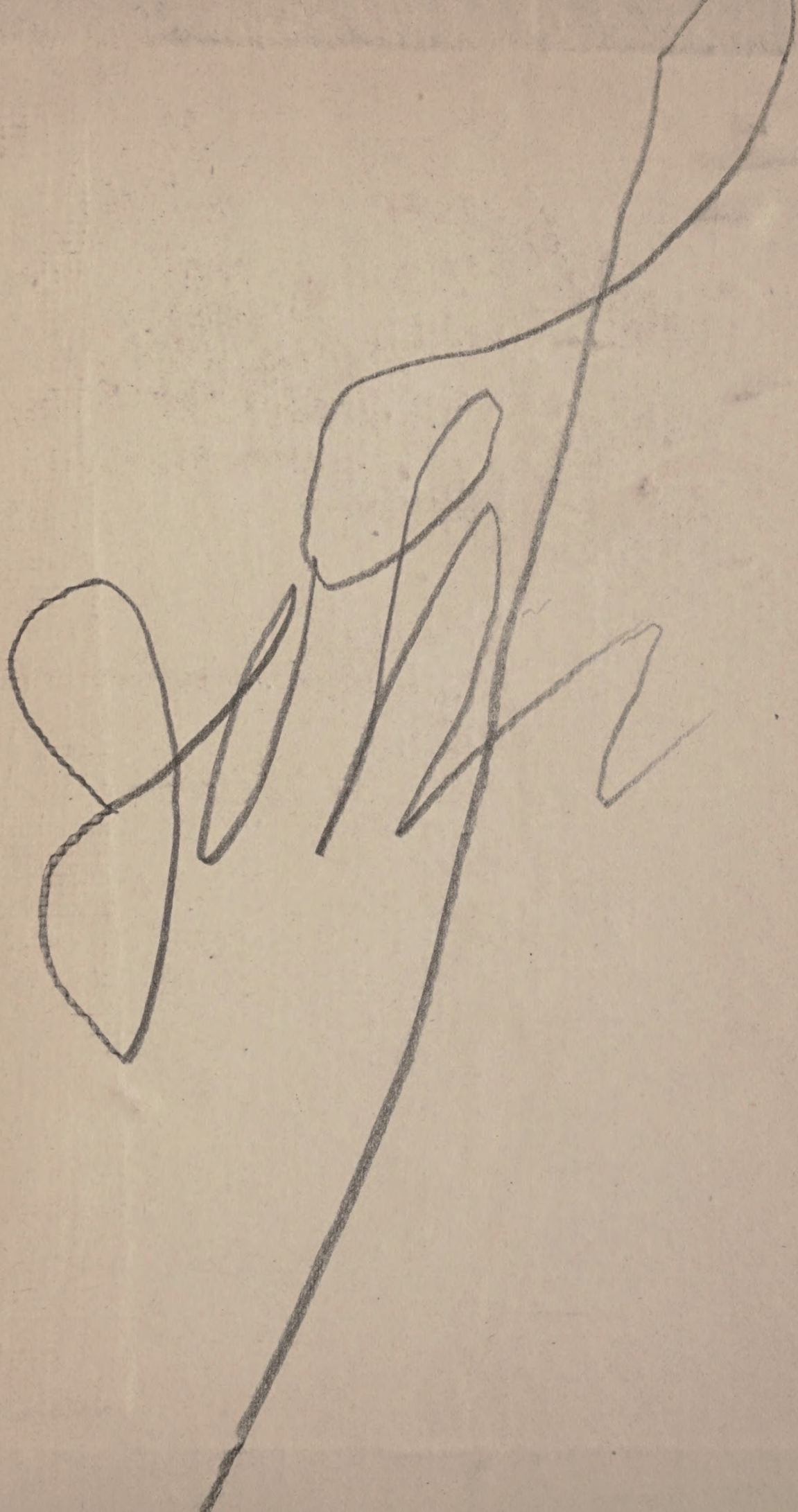
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